

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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Price 5 Cents.



"God have mercy on us!" cried Van. "Kill him!" screamed the madman, brandishing his knife. "You shall not harm him!" answers Harlowe, parrying the man's thrust and forcing him back.

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No. 87.

NEW YORK, January 31, 1900.

Price 5 Cents.

Five Years in the Grassy Sea.

BY CAPT. THOS. H. WILSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLOT.

"Well, Van, my boy, we start for home to-day."

"Yes, father, and I am glad of it."

"Do you know, old fellow, I wish this voyage was well over! I feel uneasy about it."

"Because you have so much money and such valuable property with you?"

"Not that altogether, but I fear we may never reach land."

"Why, father, the Adriatic is the staunchest steamer on the line. She is new and makes the best time of any between here and England."

"I know it, Van."

"Then, I wouldn't fret, father. There is more danger in going from England to America than there is on the way to England."

"True."

"If you are afraid of the Adriatic, we can wait for another steamer. The Oceanic goes in ten days."

"No, Van, as far as steamer's go, I would rather take this one; but I feel uneasy, nevertheless. However, it will wear off, I presume."

"It is so long since we left our home that I am dying to see it once more. Uncle Jack must quite miss me by this time."

"Oh, yes, beyond a doubt."

"You say it as if you did not think so, father."

"Oh, well, you were quite a boy when we left home, and your Uncle Jack is so busy that I don't suppose he thinks of anything but making money."

The two speakers, father and son, had spent some years in Cape Colony, Africa, and the elder had acquired a considerable fortune in the diamond fields, which he was now taking home.

They were to sail from Cape Town to England, and from there they would cross over to America, where Mr. Van Clief had a younger brother, the Uncle Jack whom the young man had mentioned.

Pierce Van Clief, called Van invariably by his father, whose name was the same, was a boy of about seventeen, and an only child.

He was handsome, active, intelligent, fairly idolized by his father, and was a general favorite wherever he went.

His uncle, John Van Clief, was a sordid, selfish, money-grabbing man, and his elder brother had spoken rightly when he had said that he would not be apt to think much of his nephew.

The two brothers had not much in common, and people said that the elder had gone away to retrieve the family fortunes,

which the reckless and willful extravagance of the younger had sadly crippled.

Pierce had heard from his brother only at rare intervals since his departure from America, ten years previous to the opening of our story, and from his last letter he inferred that Jack had at last settled down and was making money.

From what he heard indirectly he inferred that the former spendthrift was now a selfish, hard-fisted miser, from whom it would be as hard to wring a dollar as it would be to get blood from a stone, and that instead of being glad to see his brother and nephew, he was probably wishing them at that moment at the bottom of the sea.

If the elder Van Clief had known the real feeling of his brother, or had suspected the existence of a plot then on foot, he might well have hesitated about taking passage upon the Adriatic.

If the black flag of death had been hoisted from the peak instead of the British colors, it would have been far more appropriate, for the Adriatic was a doomed vessel, and but few of the goodly number who took passage upon her were destined to reach their homes.

In a little shipping office upon the wharf, not a hundred feet from where the tender lay moored, previous to making her final trip to the Adriatic, which lay just outside the harbor, sat a villainous-looking man making out bills of lading.

"This'll be the luckiest stroke I ever made," he said, "and when it is over, I can settle down and do no more work."

He finished the particular job he had on hand, and then took a letter, soiled and crumpled, from an inner pocket and spread it out before him.

This letter told a tale of desperate villainy, and was as follows:

"DARIUS CHEATHAM—SIR:—If you could find it convenient in the transaction of your own business to prevent my brother from coming home, do so by all means.

"You write me that he intends taking passage at an early date, probably in the Adriatic, as she is new, and he has some scruples about intrusting his life on any but the best vessels.

"You know best how to arrange these matters, but I think the best way is by clock-work, as before. The rates of insurance are low now, and the profits, when a vessel is lost, particularly large.

"I think you can ship an extra large consignment of diamonds on this vessel, or on one which carries my brother and his son, and with them send the clock made by Goldschmidt.

"You can set it for any day you like, but I would make it fifteen if I were you. That would bring them in a good part of the ocean in which to view an exhibition of that kind.

"When I receive the proof that these two have sailed, and

that your precious goods are with them, I will pay you extra, besides your commission, as soon as the proper time comes.

"You probably understand me, and know that I always do as I say." Thanking you for keeping me posted, and trusting that you will do your best in this matter, I remain,

"Yours to command,

"JOHN VAN CLIEF."

That there was some hidden meaning to these words was clearly apparent, and the crafty little shipping agent soon gave the clew to them.

"Aha!" he muttered, as he carefully folded the letter and put it back in his pocket. "He knows how to write letters."

Then he chuckled, and continued to himself:

"Manage it by clock-work! That's good, very good. He means the infernal machine, made by that villain Goldschmidt. Ha, ha! it's a beauty."

Well he knew its powers, for he had experimented with it and found it work to a charm, and upon the exact moment at which it was set.

He had tried it upon a heavy plank, which its sharp knife had split in two with tremendous force the moment the time indicated upon the small burnished dial had approached.

"There it is now," he muttered, "sleeping as innocently in the middle of a bale of wool, with a hundred pounds of nitroglycerine under it, as if it couldn't blow the whole business to atoms in a twinkling."

Then he rubbed his hands, glanced over his ledger, and, smiling diabolically, said:

"I've got a big consignment of wool this time, and there isn't as much difference between the bales as there is between twins. You can't tell 'em apart. True, they are all in the hole, snug and tight. I saw them put there myself."

After a few moments he went out, and just then Van Clief and his son came along and walked up the gang plank to go aboard the tug.

"Who is that, father?" asked Van, catching sight of the man.

"That's old Cheatham. He's one of the biggest shippers of wool around here. He's got no end of bales, and I believe he's sending a lot of diamonds, too, but I don't fancy them much, nor him either."

"Talk away, my man, talk away," muttered the rascally little agent. "You won't think much of anything two weeks from now. Ha, ha! Jack Van Clief will come in for a good thing when you are gone, and you don't know anything about it."

As he turned away he saw a pleasant-looking man of about thirty just stepping upon the gang plank, the sight of whom caused him a thrill of astonishment.

"Harry Harlowe here?" he muttered. "I thought he was down in the Boer country farming it. What the mischief is he doing here, I wonder?"

As the man stepped upon the tug the captain of the Adriatic appeared upon deck, and said warmly:

"Ah, Mr. Harlowe, I was looking for you. We shall sail soon now, and it wouldn't do to go without my first officer, you know."

"First officer, eh?" muttered Cheatham. "Aha, I remember, the other fellow resigned at my suggestion. Very well, Mr. Harlowe, you will go down, too, and our old account will be settled."

CHAPTER II.

THE LETTER.

"I see that rascally old Cheatham is still alive," said Harlowe, as he and the captain went into the cabin. "It's a wonder that such fellows are permitted to live."

"Oh, he is harmless enough," answered the captain. "He's got a good deal of freight aboard this trip, and a lot of diamonds."

"Worthless, I'll bet a guinea."

"Oh, they ain't his; he is merely shipping them for another party, and gets a commission on them."

"Talking of diamonds makes me think of a trick I fooled him out of once. I blew the business, and he lost his insurance. They were good for nothing, and of course he got nothing."

"But if he had paid his premiums, and the goods were lost—"

"Oh, but they weren't. I was agent, and I just left those bogus fellows out, and when the ship was lost, old Cheatham claimed his insurance, but as they weren't lost, too, of course he couldn't get it."

"Did he ship 'em on the next steamer?"

"He was obliged to, in order not to let himself out, but she arrived safe, and he had the fun of paying a high premium on

a lot of stuff not worth five shillings. He's never forgiven me for it."

"How did you happen to leave the Boer country?"

"Well, I got tired of it, and wanted to go to sea again. I heard, too, of the good fortune of a countryman of mine, an American, and I wanted to tell him about it."

"What was it?"

"Why, a friend of mine, a lawyer in New York, wrote to me, among other matters, that an uncle of this friend of mine had died within the year, leaving a large fortune."

"Was he the heir?"

"Yes, but there's a brother who claims it. He was left out in the cold, provided my friend was dead, but otherwise he gets it."

"Even if the other has heirs?"

"Well, no, I suppose not; but I really don't know whether he has or not. It's some time since I saw Van Clief, and I don't remember whether his boy—"

"Did you say Van Clief?"

"Yes. He made a pile in the diamond fields. I lost track of him, though, and I'm afraid, after all, he may have gone further away. I was in hopes of catching him in Cape Town, but I can't hear anything about him."

"Then you haven't inquired very anxiously, Mr. Harlowe, for the man and his son are going in the Adriatic, and are now aboard the tug."

"Why, this is news indeed. Well, you know since I engaged to go with you, that I have had my hands full, and haven't had time to run around much."

"I know you haven't."

Harlowe found Van Clief, and was welcomed by the latter most cordially, as he and Harlowe were warm friends, although there was some difference in their ages.

"I've got news for you, Van Clief," said Harlowe, "and I am glad you are going in this vessel," and then he told Van Clief what he had heard.

"Ha, I'm afraid your Uncle Jack will be even less glad to see you, Van, than I thought," said the man, sadly. "He will ill brook your cutting him out of a fortune. This is news, indeed; but I wonder why he has not communicated it to me. How long have you known it?"

"About two months. I tried to find you, but couldn't."

"Well, this is unexpected, and it comes when I have a fortune of my own. One always has too little or too much. There seems to be no middle ground."

"Well, I wish you joy of it, old friend, and Van, too. What a fine boy he has got to be. I am glad you are going on the same ship with me, my lad," he continued, addressing Van, "for I'll tell you lots of things you never heard of."

"Aha, Harry, up to your old tricks. You ought to be married yourself. My poor wife always liked you as a boy, because you were so good to children, and to Van especially."

"But that was when he was a little fellow."

"You'll be all the better now that he's a big fellow, I know."

"All aboard! All aboard! Time's up!" was the warning shout.

A few moments later the tug steamed away, and old Cheatham watched the men getting up the anchor on board the Adriatic, saw the last passenger transferred, heard the signal-gun, and stood watching until she spread her white wings, and saw the black smoke pouring out of her pipes.

"They're off," he said, with a grin. "There goes a fortune to me and another to Jack Van Clief, and if Harry Harlowe tells anything, much good may it do him."

Away went the Adriatic with an engine of death in her hold, strong, brave hearts in her crew and a good captain at the helm, while the fiendish little rascal on the wharf grinned and showed his satisfaction.

"The plot works well," he muttered, as he went back to the little office; "and now to destroy that tell-tale letter. Some one might guess what it meant, despite its careful wording."

He expected that he was going to draw it directly out of his pocket, but to his horror it was not there, nor in any other pocket, nor in the lining of his coat, nor anywhere about.

"Could I have dropped it?" he muttered. "It isn't on the floor, and no one has been in here since I went out. It would never do to have it found by any of my enemies."

It was not to be found on the floor, however, and then the old fellow went out upon the wharf to see if he had dropped it.

He thought he might possibly have slipped it into his vest instead of in his pocket, and that when he was walking about it had dropped down; and to make sure first he hunted all over his clothing, but without success.

Then he looked up and down on the pier, but without finding the important document, and in a state of great excitement he returned to his office and began hunting once more, with the same result as before.

"Confound it all," he muttered. "I wouldn't have lost that letter for fifty pounds; no, nor for a hundred. It's lucky it

was so carefully written, though, for if it hadn't been, I should be in a nice fix. However, there's no use fretting, and so I'll think no more about it."

The fatal paper was to play an important part, however, in his future destiny, and it would have been better if he had not lost it; but as it was, there was no recovering it now, and the only thing to be done was to make the best of a bad bargain, and say no more about it.

Had the wily little wretch seen a certain shabby-looking passenger pick up a folded piece of paper which was fluttering about on the stone pier and put it in his pocket, before going aboard the tender, he would have wished more heartily than ever that the destruction of the Adriatic would be more complete than ever he had anticipated.

He did not know that that curiously-worded letter was now aboard the doomed steamer, and that a sinister-looking passenger had it tucked away in his pocket, and that though its real meaning was not apparent, that the day would come when it would be as plain as the daylight.

True, the opening sentence was the only one that afforded any clue whatever, but small as that was, it was a dangerous weapon in the hands of an unscrupulous man like Matt Merton, the passenger in question.

Merton was returning to England like the others, and there were many who would have been glad to detain him, for his record was not a clean one, and he was suspected of robbing more than one poor fellow who had risked his life and health in the diamond fields.

He shipped on the Adriatic under an assumed name and at the last moment, so that there might be no chance of the colonial police getting wind of his intentions and stopping him, and he had therefore escaped this danger only to meet a worse.

He kept secluded until the last speck of land had disappeared, and even then he did not mix much with the rest, but remained alone by himself nearly all the time.

He had not read the paper yet, but he had made a habit of always picking up stray bits like that, for luck sometimes comes from so doing, and there would be time enough to read it before he landed in England, provided he ever did land.

Away and away sped the Adriatic, further from land, nearer to her doom; and, all unconscious, the passengers were looking anxiously for the time when they should see their country once more, and be happy in the recognition of old friends and old scenes, and their weary wanderings would be over.

Van made friends with nearly everybody on board, and of course Harry Harlowe was the best of all, for he told the lad many an interesting fact about the ocean, and was as full of jokes and fun as he could hold.

The lad made advances to the silent passenger, Matt Merton, but the latter had very little to say, and Van soon gave up the attempt, devoting all his attention to his father and the first officer, whenever Harlowe was at liberty.

The days passed by, and one night Merton read the letter he had found, being strangely agitated by it.

"These two must be the same," he thought, "I have heard the boy talk of his Uncle Jack, and this man, too, is returning to inherit a fortune. There is mischief in this letter; but what it is I don't know. My God! the clock of Goldschmidt! I know the villain. Why didn't I read this thing before? There is an infernal machine aboard!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WRECK.

"I see it all now," gasped Merton. "I know Sigmund Goldschmidt, the clock-maker, well, and the devilish ingenuity he possesses. All is clear to me now. Good Heavens! Let me read this diabolical letter again."

He read it over once more with feverish anxiety, and then exclaimed, as he walked up and down the narrow extent of his state-room:

"Induce them to go on the Adriatic—prevent them from reaching home—manage the thing by clock-work, as before. Great God! It is only too plain."

He smote his forehead with his hands, and then whispered: "Send his precious goods with the clock. That means diamonds, and this is the man who was charged by Harlowe with insuring worthless stuff. They were to go on the Atlantic, but she was lost. I know Cheatham. He is a villain and—worse than that—a contemptible sneak. It was he that nearly had me copped by the police. Curse him! he is as bad as I am myself. Worse, for I could not commit wholesale murder like this!"

"I saw him drop that paper, and knew it must be of value, or I would have returned it. The cowardly villain, to imperil

a whole ship's company for gold! Why, oh, why didn't I read this before? Stop, there may yet be time."

He glanced over the letter again, and then turned deadly pale.

"Fifteen days!" he gashed. "Oh, the foolish neglect, the criminal forgetfulness I have been guilty of! Fifteen days! My God, this is the fifteenth day itself. Pray Heaven I may not be too late."

Though a bad man, and one who had not shrunk from the committal of many crimes, Matt Merton was horrified at this new evidence of man's depravity, and his very soul revolted at the awful thought of sacrificing so many lives in this fearful manner for the mere love of gain.

He was bad, but this was fiendish, and even his base mind was horrified at the enormity of such a deed.

"There may yet be time," he murmured. "I will see the captain at once."

Van was sitting in the moonlight talking to Harlowe, his father being at some little distance, and the passengers scattered about the deck at the time that this conflict of emotion was taking place in the breast of the silent passenger.

"What a lovely night," he said to Harlowe. "One would never suppose that a storm had ever ruffled these waters; they look so tranquil."

"And yet I have seen them anything but that," answered Harlowe. "We're going finely now in this current, and it's as good as a fair wind. Not many more days and nights, Van, will pass before we'll be in England."

"I shall be glad, for father worries a good deal. He does not say much, but I know he fears some calamity."

"But the Adriatic is stanch. There's no fear of—"

"There's Martin," said Van, that being the name by which Merton was known. "How excited he looks. What is he saying?"

"He's inquiring for one of the officers. I'll go and see what he wants."

"My God, Mr. Harlowe!" cried Merton. "Call the captain, or we are lost!"

"What do you mean?"

"That there is an in—"

Boom!

"Too late, too late!" gasped the man, and then fell unconscious to the deck.

"What has happened?" cried Van, hurrying up.

"I don't know, something has exploded. Call all hands there, boatswain. Rouse the captain, steward."

"We are on fire!" shrieked a voice.

"We are sinking!"

"To the boats!"

At this moment the captain rushed on deck without his hat, and in a state of the utmost excitement.

"Man the boats at once!" he cried. "Let none but the women and children enter first."

A scene of the wildest excitement followed, and one which entirely beggars description, the hubbub being frightful and the danger most imminent.

The deck was forced apart and flames rushed up in great jets, billows of scalding steam rolled over the scene, clouds of thick, stifling smoke hung over all like a funeral pall, and like a frightened animal the steamer shivered and groaned, rocked and pitched, and seemed ready at any moment to plunge into the sea.

The flames seemed to burst out in every part of the ship at once, and many perished from sheer fright at the outset, others madly leaping overboard, with no thought of what they were doing, while some stood motionless and without the power to stir hand or foot for their safety.

It was a scene of the utmost terror, but in the midst of it all, Van worked indefatigably, helping Harlowe to get the terrified women and children into the boats, and encouraging his poor father, who seemed utterly helpless and despondent.

Matt Merton lay unconscious for some minutes, and then Van dragged him away, the flames having burst up through the deck not three feet from where he lay.

The captain went off in one of the boats, and the second mate in another, Harlowe remaining behind to construct a raft.

Some of the boats had been annihilated in the first explosion and what remained were not sufficient to bear all the survivors, and with a rare forgetfulness of self, Harlowe seized an ax and plied it most vigorously in cutting the timbers necessary for the construction of a support on which to intrust their lives over the ocean.

Van helped, and soon afterward Merton fell to and rendered valuable assistance, half a dozen sailors, comprising the remainder of those left behind, doing good work under Harlowe's direction.

The work had to be done hastily, for the ship was fast set-

fling down, the waves threatening to complete the work begun by the flames.

The fear of death incited every man to do his utmost, and in a marvelously short time a comparatively stout raft of considerable size was launched, supplied with water, provisions, a mast and sail, chests and blankets, and other necessities, hastily gathered up, and then as the flames grew brighter and the pale moon was obscured by the heavy masses of smoke, the survivors pushed off and confided their lives to the keeping of the treacherous ocean.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAFT.

Day succeeded day, night followed night, and still the victims of man's passion and greed floated upon the ocean helpless and alone.

One by one the sailors died or became mad and leaped into the treacherous deep, which closed over them, and left no trace to show where or how they had perished.

One by one they dropped off, and the same fate seemed staring them all in the face—seemed reaching out its gaunt and bony fingers to clutch them in its grasp.

Day after day, each more monotonous than its fellow, passed by, and still no hope, still no signs of a rescue, no welcome sight of a sail, however distant.

Frenzied and hopeless, tortured with maddening doubts and fears, the sailors perished and were consigned to the ocean, till at last all that remained on the raft were four persons.

Van Clief seemed hardly alive, for he would lie hour by hour flat upon his back, and never move or speak, and it was only by his faint breathing that Van knew he still lived.

Poor Van, he was terribly wasted and emaciated. The terrors of that dreadful night—the exposure to wind and rain—to the torturing heat of the day and the chilling air of the night—the lack of food, the scarcity of water—all these having told terribly upon him, despite his brave heart and strong constitution.

Twenty-five days had passed since the explosion, and now their food had given out, the water was all but exhausted and the prospect seemed even more hopeless than before.

Harlowe had watched over the lad with the tenderest of care, and had frequently denied himself that Van might not suffer; but now all seemed to be in vain, and the end but a little further off.

Merton had revealed his knowledge of the plot against their lives, and how it had been acquired, and had sworn solemnly that if he were permitted to live he would bring to justice the villains who had planned and executed this most diabolical scheme.

These four men were all that remained of the crew of the raft, after twenty-five days of agonizing, hopeless, tormenting anguish, days of terror, nights of pain, weeks of bitter disappointment.

Van Clief had saved a belt containing his diamonds, but their presence seemed a mockery, for what was all this wealth when they were starving, dying of thirst and exposure?

Van had slept much during this last night, and it was a mercy that he did, for the water was all but exhausted, and had he been awake he would have called for water unceasingly.

Harlowe was mad with apprehension, not for himself, but for the boy, to whom he was greatly attached, and whom he could not see suffer unmoved, and yet whom he could afford but little relief.

Merton was delirious, and seemed like a wild beast, his shaggy, matted hair hanging over his forehead into his eyes, and augmenting the fierce look which now constantly rested upon his face.

He had long since revealed his identity, and was now called by his own name, but as there seemed little chance of his finally escaping, it did not matter much whether he was known or not.

Van Clief had slept a good deal, but now toward morning he awoke and called feverishly to Harlowe to come to him.

The man was at his side in a moment, and, taking his hand, looked into his face and felt a choking sensation in his throat as he saw the signs of approaching dissolution in the poor man's emaciated countenance.

"Harlowe," said Van Clief faintly, "you have been a good friend to Van since that horrible night, and I thank you for it. You will continue to be so?"

"Indeed I will, my old friend."

"I am dying, Harlowe, and have but a few minutes more to live. Take these diamonds and keep them for Van. They are his fortune. If my brother John has been wicked enough to do

this horrible thing, let him keep his money. It is accursed, and can never do him good."

"Oh, never fear, Van Clief, you will laugh at fortune yet. Your diamonds are a fortune in themselves."

"No, no, Harlowe, I am dying. Promise me that you will look after my poor boy as long as he lives, and if you are saved to watch over him as if he were your own."

"Throw him overboard," said Merton. "It's unlucky to have a dead man aboard."

"You brute," answered Harlowe.

"I'll kill you, too, if you provoke me," cried the other, leaping to his feet and drawing a knife. "You and the boy, too."

Harlowe leaped up and drew his own knife as the man rushed upon him, and Van, disturbed by the noise, awoke and called for a drink, complaining bitterly of thirst.

"Throw him overboard!" hissed Merton. "We can't have any brats here. There isn't enough for us as it is."

Van sprang forward and leaned over the wasted form of his poor father, calling upon him to answer him most piteously.

The man would never speak again, for in that last moment he had passed beyond the land of pain and suffering and was at rest.

"God have mercy on us," cried Van, falling on his knees and raising his hands in prayer.

"Kill him!" screamed the madman, brandishing his knife.

"You shall not harm him," answered Harlowe, parrying the man's thrust and forcing him back at the point of his own keen knife.

And Van, kneeling there, by the side of his dead father, with his hands folded and his eyes uplifted to Heaven, Harlowe protecting him at the risk of his own life, murmured this petition:

"Father of all, look down and protect a poor boy, confided to Thy care. Spare my life and those of my companions. Send help to us, and end our sufferings. Bless us all, and——"

"You hear?" said Harlowe. "He prays for you, and you would kill him."

"Oh, God, send a sail!" cried Van, in agony.

"Amen," added Harlowe.

Merton dropped his knife, fell upon his knees and burst into tears, and at that moment the red sun broke from the clouds and revealed a sight which fairly made Harlowe's heart jump.

Van darted a quick glance at the horizon, and then, leaping to his feet, threw up his hands and fairly shrieked:

"Thank God! A sail, a sail!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TYRANT.

"Wide-awake there, you lubbers! Don't be all night! Tumble up there, or I'll jump down your thundering throats!"

So spoke the captain of the ship Snowflake, as tyrannical a man as ever trod a quarter-deck.

With him, as has been said of others, it was a word and a blow, but generally the blow first, for he had an ungovernable temper, and was as strong as an ox in the bargain.

It was at the beginning of the first night-watch, and as the men did not turn up quick enough to suit him, he used the words above quoted, shouting them down the fore-castle hatch in a manner that made them doubly impressive.

The first man that tumbled up, according to the skipper's elegant wording, tumbled down again rather more quickly than he was ready for, the captain's brawny fist taking him on the side of the head and felling him to the deck in an instant.

The next man dodged the intended blow, and scurried aft in a twinkling to relieve the man at the wheel, but the third, a slight fellow, scarcely more than a boy, received a blow on the temple that literally knocked him senseless at the brute's feet.

"Shame!" cried a voice.

"What's that?" cried the skipper, with an oath, as he wheeled quickly around in the direction of the voice.

This gave the others below a chance to scramble up and get out of reach of their tyrant, for when he turned about they were all on deck and in their places.

"Who spoke, I say?" demanded the captain again, in a voice of thunder. "By the furies, I'll find it out if I have to flog every man aboard the ship!"

No one spoke, and the skipper, glaring around with a brow as black as a thunder-cloud, said:

"'Twas one of the port watch. You can stay on deck until I know who the man was. Chuck a bucket of water over that fool there. He is only shamming. It ain't the first time by any means."

"He 'pears to be badly hurted," said an honest-looking seaman, stepping up and lifting the boy in his arms, where he lay limp and unconscious. "Wasn't you a little intemperate, skipper?"

"What's that to you?" growled the other. "I'll do what I like on my own ship with my own crew. They're a lot of lazy dogs."

"No, you can't, skipper," said the man who had interposed, and who was now bathing the boy's pale forehead with a wet handkerchief. "They is sech a thing as murder on the high seas, and the laws don't deal temperately with them as does it."

"Shut up! Don't give me any of your lectures, Mr. Slush, for I won't stand them. Take the lubber out of the way."

"I reckon ye've done fur him this time, skipper. Them knuckles o' yours ain't as soft as a feather piller, and the boy's head is still a-bleedin'. Ye ought to be more temperate, I tell ye."

"Was it you that cried 'Shame!' you greasy lubber?"

"Ye kin settle on it that it wur, skipper, and I sticks to it. It wur a shame, and you know it."

"By thunder! Do you dare to talk to me like that, you infernal bald-headed rat. Take that!"

That was a blow on the head, but the sturdy tar did not take it, being too quick for the irate captain, and parrying the blow neatly with an upward stroke of his left arm.

"I'll settle you by and by," he growled. "As for the rest of you"—turning to the men whose watch below it was—"you can turn in, since I have found out who was fool enough to dispute my word. Turn in with you, and if you ain't up sharp at eight bells you can know what to expect."

The men went below, and then the captain turned to vent his wrath upon the cook, who, by virtue of his office, was derisively termed Mr. Slush by the captain, but the cook was out of sight.

The boy whom the skipper had struck was standing in the waist, having recovered from his faint, though still quite weak, and on him the tyrannical captain vented his spite.

"Here, you lubber," he shouted, coupling the epithet with an oath, "go aloft and take in that main-royal. Lively, now, or I'll jump on you."

The youth obeyed, but his trembling limbs and weak grasp totally unfitted him for the work; and he had hardly reached the topmast cross-trees before a sudden lurch of the vessel caused him to lose his hold, and he shot through the air with great rapidity.

He fell with a sickening thud upon the deck, and lay as still as death; but the brutal skipper strode up to him and gave him a sharp kick in the side.

"Get up!" he roared; but the boy lay still and silent, and never moved; and the captain, leaving him there, went into the cabin, giving orders to the second mate to call him if any important change in the weather took place.

When he had disappeared, the cook, whose name was Chipps, and who was an oddity in his way, came out of the galley and took the boy below, laid him in his bunk and administered to his wants.

He did not stay long, for he heard the angry voice of the captain swearing and blaspheming, and he hurriedly returned to his galley.

"Now, you Slush, what have you been doing?" demanded the captain.

"Looking arter that poor boy, skipper. He's more badly hurted than he was afore. Reckon he's got his clearance papers for t'other world this time, sure."

"Serve him right, the lazy dog. He's been of no use to me since he came aboard."

"Now you're gettin' intemperate ag'in, skipper. Yer ought ter be more mod'rate. Temperance is a great virtue, and the more we practice it the better we are."

"Shut up with your lectures, and come down into the cabin and have a glass of grog."

"Thank'ee, skipper, I don't care if I do, for while I don't believe in intemperance, I consider moderation a mighty good thing."

"Shut up, you old sot. You know you like a good stiff horn of grog as well as I do myself."

Captain North, of the Snowflake, was a sordid, brutal, hard-hearted, tyrannical man, and the scenes which I have just described, or similar ones, were of daily occurrence, sometimes, in fact, happening three or four times in twenty-four hours.

He was strong and muscular, and fairly cowed the men under his command by his savage brutality and rigid enforcement of all the arbitrary rules which he made for the better maintenance of his authority.

He would knock a man down for a single look, and for a word would impose an extra hour at the wheel, besides making the offender feel the weight of his fist.

Many a poor fellow for a trivial offense was deprived of his watch below and given extra work, a further punishment being imposed if he was at all slack in its performance.

In consequence of this harsh conduct Captain North was hated and despised, and yet always found sailors enough, as

he paid good wages, made comparatively short voyages and gave large advances.

He was shrewd enough to do this, and to treat his men well on shore, but once let him get into blue water and all the devil in his nature came out, utterly obliterating all that had seemed pleasant before.

Having introduced this person to our readers—and he is happily a type which is nearly extinct—we will go on to the interview in the cabin between him and the cook.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MURDER.

"You infernal old sea-horse, I've a mind to poison your grog," were the first words the captain uttered when the two worthies were alone and sitting opposite each other in the little cabin.

"Ye dassen't, skipper," said Chipps. "It wouldn't be healthy."

"If you didn't know what you do, you wouldn't talk to me so, you lubber, but, blast your eyes, I'm in your power, and you know it. What in the name of the infernal did you want to say anything about murder for?"

"Ye don't like to hear that 'ere intemperate word, do ye, skipper? I'm afraid that lad won't last through the night."

"I didn't kill him, blame you," cried the captain, in a startled voice. "You can't say I did that job, at any rate, no matter—"

"What I kin say about the other ones? Waal, I don't know, skipper, the law isn't at all mod'rate on some subjicks, and I'm greatly afraid that it would be denominated manslaughter, and that ye would be incarcerated for a period not less than four years, and not exceed—"

"Shut up about that, confound you, and take your grog," and here the captain poured out a full glass of rum and shoved it over toward Chipps, who drank a swallow, and then filling the glass up with water, sat gazing longingly at the ardent beverage.

"You ain't got some sugar, are you, skipper?" he asked.

"Help yourself," and North pushed the bowl toward his companion, who stirred in a large handful.

"You must be careful about your language, drat your fat sides," continued the skipper. "You'll be having the men in mutiny if you don't look out. You've got me where you want me, here in the cabin, but you must be careful on deck. Think what might happen—"

"I'm thinkin', skipper, and if you don't be more circumspect, as I might say, I won't be able to keep the men's hands off'n yer throat. A word from me would—"

"Have you finished that last jug of rum I let you have? If so, get another, and help yourself whenever you like out of my jug as well."

"Now, skipper, you know I am mod'rate and don't believe in intemperance. Let me tell you, I ain't goin' to endure any more tyranny on your part. You hev been goin' it wuss this y'ge than ever I see ye afore, and Dick Hansen, the Swede, has sharpened up his sheath knife till the p'int and aidge is as keen as a razor. I are got a pretty good one o' my own, too, skipper, and—"

"Here's your health, Chipps, old boy," and the captain raised his glass and winked, the cook following suit and draining his tumbler to the very bottom.

He was in such a mellow state by that time that Captain North had no trouble in coaxing him to drink again, and the result was that in ten or fifteen minutes the man who believed so strongly in moderation was as drunk as a lord.

While he sat in his chair like a log, with his head on the table, and snoring like a steam engine, the captain reached over and took his knife out of his belt.

He examined it carefully, and seeing the cook's name cut upon the handle, smiled grimly, and then went out upon the deck wrapped in an oilskin coat worn by the cook when the weather was bad. He might have been gone ten minutes, when he returned with a look of intense satisfaction on his face, and, going into the cabin where the drunken cook lay asleep, laughed softly.

"You fool!" he muttered, "I could kill you where you sit, but I have a better revenge in store for you. We'll see now whether your knowledge of my past life will do you any good hereafter. I fancy not."

In the morning the cook awoke as usual from force of habit, and began making his fires and getting ready for breakfast as he had done many a time before.

He had put his biscuits in the oven, got his potatoes boiling and was peeling some onions to fry, when the first mate came into the galley hurriedly, and said:

"That was a bad business of yours last night, cook. Why did you do it?"

"The fellow wasn't on'y a boy, and the skipper didn't ought to abuse him so. How is he this morning?"

"Dead. That wasn't what I meant, though, and you know it. I am talking of Dirk Hansen."

"What of him, Mr. Norris?"

"Do you ask me that—you, whose knife was found sticking in his heart this morning?"

"What?" cried the cook, fairly leaping from his seat, "Dirk Hansen found dead with my knife——"

"Driven to the shaft in his heart as he lay in his bunk. The men on deck saw you go down into the forecabin during the middle watch. They recognized you by your coat."

"But I ain't had——"

"We found it in your room just now, and the sleeves were stained with blood. You will not deny that you slept there last night."

"I dunno. I was there this morning, but I don't remember going to bed."

"Captain North says you turned in at ten o'clock."

"But Dirk is dead?"

"Yes, and the men are in a rage. I tell you, this is a bad business for you."

"I swear to goodness, Mr. Norris, that I don't know——"

Here a confused murmur was heard just outside, and then one of the sailors poked his head in and said:

"Come out here, Chipps. You're wanted."

Chipps stepped boldly out and said, without further parley:

"I know what you're goin' to say, and I want ye just to be mod'rate, and not condemnify me without a hearin'. Do you actooally believe as I killed your comrade?"

"Course we do," said one of the men. "Wasn't your knife found stuck into him clean up to the hasp?"

"I dunno, surely. Mayhap it was, and mayhap it wasn't. I haven't been there to see."

"Well, it wur," said the man, "an' there's a dozen kin prove it."

"Who be they?"

"Me and Mister Norris, Sam Brown, Bill Sweep, Tom Binnacle, Joe Bunt and all o' the starboard watch."

"If you says so, and Mr. Norris and Tom Binnacle, it must be so, 'cause I knows ye tell the truth. As fur as findin' the knife goes, that's nothin'."

"Nor the blood on your coat?"

"Not a bit."

"Them's pretty good proofs, Mr. Chipps."

"They don't amount to shucks. Somebody has done this yer, and tried to put it on me."

"Who was it?"

"Did I ever quarrel with Dirk Hansen?"

"Nary onct."

"Wasn't I allus mod'rate and temperate with him? Didn't he allus treat me decent when he quarreled with every one besides?"

"You and him allus 'peared to be friends," said Tom Binnacle, shifting the plug of tobacco in his mouth from one side to the other.

"Didn't you often hear Dick threaten to go fur the captain, and wasn't the skipper allus a naggin' o' him and cuffin' him around?"

"Right you are, Mr. Chipps."

"And you knowed that Dirk had sharpened his knife so's to stick the skipper if he got too intemperate in his speech?"

There was no answer to this question, the men feeling that the cook was treading on delicate ground, and the second mate looked surprised.

"You know he did," said the cook, "and you know he was ready for mutiny, and a dozen others with him. I told the captain of it last night, and told him to look out, 'cause I likes to be mod'rate in everything."

The men began to regard him with black looks, for nearly all of them were implicated in the matter, and they suspected that Chipps had betrayed them.

"Ye needn't look so extraordinary gloomy and suspicious-like," he continued, "for I ain't given no names away. I on'y cautioned the skipper, 'cause I do like things done mod'rate, and I hoped he might let up a little."

"You're as much in it as we."

"I know that. If you want to know who killed Dirk Hansen, go and ax the skipper."

"Do you swear it wasn't you?"

"Most assuredly. And funder, who was it abused the boy last night and kicked him when he lay dyin' on the deck?"

"It was the skipper, curse him!"

"Now is our time, men!"

"Down with the tyrant!"

And with loud cries the men rushed aft, all armed and ripe for rebellion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MUTINY.

"What is the meaning of all this noise?" demanded Captain North, coming out of the cabin, pistol in hand.

"It means mutiny, that's what it means," cried Joe Bunt. "Down with the murderer, boys!"

"You will have it, then," roared the enraged captain. "Take that, you villain, and learn to keep your peace!"

"Crack!"

"Thud!"

The sharp report of the pistol sounded upon the still air, and then came a dull thud as Joe Bunt fell to the deck dead.

"Upon him, my boys," yelled Binnacle, and, drawing an iron belaying pin from the rail, he sprang at the captain with the utmost fury.

"Ahoy there, Blake, Norris, all of you!" roared North. "There is mutiny!"

"So there is!" cried Sweep, aiming a blow at the skipper's head.

The two mates, the steward and carpenter rushed in, taking sides with the captain, but Mr. Norris was felled in a twinkling.

The captain fought like a tiger, and, seizing a handspike from the mainmast, laid about him most vigorously, knocking down two or three of his opponents.

The men came swarming up in numbers to assist their associates, and it looked as if the captain would be beaten.

He retreated to the cabin and locked himself in, he and his officers, after which a sharp battle began, the skipper firing upon the men from loopholes and killing half a dozen before the others got under cover.

Then four or five armed with axes climbed up into the rigging, and, crossing to the mizzenmast, slid down by the braces, and, springing upon the house, began to attack it with their sharp axes.

Several more dropped over the rail and made their way aft along the planksheer, until they had joined their comrades, when they joined them in the work of destruction.

Quick and steady flew the axes, and before long one of the deck planks was cut in two and the men pried it up and enlarged the opening.

They had not noticed the skylight, and presently a bullet came crashing through the glass, and, striking one of the mutineers in the base of the spinal column, finished his work forever.

The others flew to the skylight and demolished it in an instant with their axes, two or three leaping down, expecting to surprise the captain before he could reload.

The first was met by the mate, who literally blew the top of his head off with a double-barreled shotgun, while the second doubling one leg under him and falling in a painful position, was brained by the brutal captain before he could rise.

The steward grappled with the third man and drove a knife into his throat, the captain finishing the work by putting a pistol to his ear as he lay writhing in pain and sending a bullet through his brain, causing instant death.

I do not care to dwell upon these distressing scenes longer than is actually necessary in order to show the terrible nature of the struggle and the fiendishness of the captain, whose hour was close at hand, and I will therefore pass quickly to the sequel.

Captain North, with the ferocity of a wild beast, armed himself with all the pistols he could find, loaded and thrust them into his belt, and then rushed upon deck, discharging them right and left with fatal effect, every shot telling, so that each sharp report was the funeral knell of some poor fellow.

Numerous shots were fired at him, but he seemed to bear a charmed life; the bullets passing harmlessly by him and falling into the sea or flattening against the rail.

The other officers were right at his heels, and the mutineers, seeing with alarm their best men killed or hewn down, lost heart and fell back in dismay before their angry captain.

"Do you surrender?" he cried at last.

"Yes," replied the handful that was left.

"All right then. Go to your work, but mind, every man of you goes to prison the moment I reach a port."

At that moment the steward cried out:

"Look to windward, captain! There's an everlasting squall coming up."

The man was right, and in a twinkling, before a hand could be raised, it was upon them, and threatening the ship with utter destruction.

There was no one at the wheel, and the sails were taken aback, the halyards parted with a loud snap; the huge waves rushing up, swept clear across the deck, breaking down the bulwarks, flooding the cabin and carrying every movable thing

into the sea, while the lightning, flashing with perternatural brightness, fairly blinded the men.

It was morning, to be sure, but the heavens were as black as night, and scarcely a thing could be seen for the frightful darkness which suddenly settled down all around the doomed ship.

The thunder roared and crashed, the masts were struck and rent in twain by the fierce lightning; the wind blew a lively gale, and the waters were lashed into a perfect fury, so that nothing could withstand their onslaught.

The squall was succeeded by others only a shade less violent, and when the last one had passed, the vessel lay bruised and battered upon the surface of the ocean, her masts and sails gone, her rudder and bowsprit carried away, her decks littered with rubbish, her hold half full of water, and all but a few of her crew dead.

Those who still lived were Chipps, the cabin boy, a little fellow named Dave, the captain, the second mate, the steward and the ship's carpenter, and these were all, the others having perished.

It was close upon night, and the probabilities were that the ship would not float until morning, the captain giving it as his opinion that midnight would see the last of her.

There was one good boat remaining, and into this he put clothing, water, provisions and other supplies sufficient for himself and three companions.

With a blood-curdling oath he told Chipps that he needn't bother about furnishing the boat, for he wasn't going in it, as there was but room enough for himself and those who had stood by him.

"You didn't take part in the mutiny, but you formed it, you lubber, and I won't have you with me. You can go down with the Snowflake, since you are so fond of her."

"All right, captain," answered Chipps, coolly. "I ain't any fonder o' your company than you are of mine, all animadversions to the contrary, notwithstanding. I ain't fond o' work, and I'm glad to get out of furnishing your boat for you."

The men set to work, and when their boat had in it all that it would hold, North ordered what remained to be thrown overboard, and several barrels of meat, kegs of hard-tack, sacks of flour and casks of water were destroyed forthwith.

"May you see the time when you'll need all those things, skipper," said Chipps, solemnly. "You are a devil, but you'll suffer wuss'n ye think for yet. I knowed ye was bad, but this goes ahead—"

"Captain, she is settling more and more," said the steward, hastily. "We must be off at once."

"Pile in then. Come, Davy."

The boy drew back and regarding the captain with the utmost horror, put his hand into that of the abandoned cook, and said stoutly:

"No! I will not go with such a brute, for you are all hurrying to your destruction. I will stay with Chipps."

The captain swore a huge oath and struck at the lad, but the carpenter pulled him into the boat, and then they rowed away, leaving Chipps and the boy Davy alone on the sinking ship.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CASTAWAY.

The Snowflake did not sink that night, as was expected, and when the sun rose she was still afloat, although she had settled fully two feet since the previous night.

The heartless captain had not destroyed all the provisions, though what remained were not easy of access, and formed but a small portion of the original stock.

Chipps had secreted an ax, and with this he now set to work forming a raft, Dave helping him about the light portions, and saving him many steps by bringing him things he wanted.

The raft was made large enough to hold a dozen persons, and had a double deck, a mast and ample sail, rudder, a rail around three sides, and a covered cabin, made of the galley, which the cook wheeled right on to his raft and lashed securely to ringbolts driven into the planks.

He and Davy secured several barrels of water, two small casks of rum, a barrel of flour, two of salt pork, two of hard-tack and one each of potatoes, apples and onions, the last having been overlooked by the selfish-hearted skipper.

There were a few cans of fresh meats, soups, vegetables and preserves, and these were stowed away carefully by the prudent cook, who knew their value.

There was no chart nor compass, no nautical instruments or hour glass, nothing to tell where they were or how fast they were progressing, but these were minor matters, so long as they had food and shelter, and Chipps wasted no time in fretting over his loss.

The Snowflake continued to settle slowly, and at last the solitary workman did not dare to wait any longer, and putting in his last supplies, took the stars and stripes from the captain's locker and hoisted it to the top of his mast, spread his sail, pushed off and began a voyage destined to last far longer than he had ever dreamed.

Little Dave seemed sorry to leave the poor old Snowflake, and cried bitterly as they floated away, but Chipps comforted him, and he soon forgot his sorrow in slumber, being nearly worn out by his labors.

It was now early afternoon, and there was a good breeze, the sail drawing well and carrying the raft ahead at a lively rate.

Chipps trimmed his sail well, and, as he scudded along, looked back occasionally to see if the Snowflake had yet gone down.

It was not long before he beheld a sudden agitation of the waters, saw the waves heave and toss their foamy crests into the air, saw a sudden rush of white, a tremendous upheaval, a sudden swirling, eddying, billowy motion, and then the spray was thrown high into the air, and fell with a pattering sound like rain.

The Snowflake had sunk at last, and the strangely assorted pair, the grizzled man and the pretty boy, were alone indeed.

* * * * *

A fortnight has passed, and old Chipps is alone upon his raft, which still supports and shelters him.

Poor little Dave has gone from him, and his heart is sad indeed, for the boy was a loved companion in this terrible solitude, and his loss seems irreparable.

The exposure and excitement were too much for the boy, suffering as he already was from the cruel blows inflicted by the hard-hearted captain, and at the end of ten days he succumbed, and, laying his tired head in his friend's lap, breathed his last.

Poor Chipps seemed inconsolable when Dave died, and watched over his body all night as if to recall it to life, but when the morning came and the boy did not answer him, but lay so still and white with his little hands folded across his breast and his curly head still reclining in the other's lap, the poor man burst into a flood of tears, a thing he had not done for a score of years, and, laying the boy tenderly down in the little cabin, covered his face with a handkerchief and turned sadly away.

The cabin boy was buried in the depths of the remorseless ocean, with a shroud of sail-cloth about him and a weight at his feet, his hands folded as they had been, his locks neatly brushed, and his clothing arranged as tidily as Chipps could make it, and thus he was laid away to rest to await the judgment day, while the waves rolled on as carelessly as ever, and the winds sported with them as though a human heart had not sought repose there, or the grief of a poor old man had not there sought vainly to assuage its bitterness.

So the days passed and melted into weeks, and still the lonely castaway was tossed about on the ocean, his grief gradually calming and growing into a settled melancholy, which nothing but the presence of others could do away with.

* * * * *

Van had indeed seen a sail, and it was not the mere fancy of a disordered imagination.

The sail was distant, to be sure, but it was bearing down toward them, and the shipwrecked companions felt assured that they would be seen.

Nearer and nearer it came, and before long they could make out that the strange craft was a raft like their own, and that it bore a single occupant.

This was a bitter disappointment, for they had expected a ship, but as it approached, their vexation grew less, and they welcomed the stranger with delight.

They could see that his raft was larger than their own, that he was supplied with a good sail and a shelter, that he had provisions, and, better yet, water, the casks being plainly visible.

The man himself sat on a cask in a very careless attitude, holding a black pipe in one hand and in the other a huge sandwich, which he bit at between the whiffs of his pipe.

Van was almost ready to throw himself in the sea and swim to the other raft, the sight of food and water fairly maddening him, but Harlowe held him back, and then the lone man on the other raft cried out coolly:

"Take it mod'rate, my friends. We should be temperate in all things. Wait till I finish my sandwich and I'll chuck ye a line."

"For God's sake, don't desert us in our extremity," cried Merton, making a motion as if to leap into the sea.

"Never fear, my friend. That ain't the way that Chipps does business. I'm glad I seen ye, 'cause I wanted some one to help me finish this yer breakfast. Just you hold on a shake."

Then, putting away his pipe and washing down the last crumb of his sandwich with a cup of water, Chipps—for he it was indeed—guided his raft toward the other skillfully, and

when the two came alongside he quickly made them fast, and said quietly:

"Give the boy a show fust, and then the old man what's fast asleep."

"Alas, you have come too late to save him," said Harlowe, sadly, "for he is dead!"

"Sho! I'm sorry I spoke so sudden. But I'm glad to see the rest of you, and I expects we'll all have a fine voyage together."

Ah, none of them knew what a long voyage theirs would be, and what exciting events would take place ere it was finished.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ORATOR.

"How did you happen to be shipwrecked and floating about all alone on the Atlantic? Tell us of your adventures. I am crazy to hear them."

"Not now, my lad; wait till to-morrow. We must be temperate in all things, and my yarns on top o' your sufferings would be anything but mod'rate. Wait until to-morrow."

It was evening; that succeeding the morning of the rescue, and Van had asked Chipps to tell him his adventures, the latter replying as above.

During the day the body of Van Clief had been consigned to its last resting-place in the deep Atlantic, and Chipps had administered to the wants of his new friends, in moderation, however, for it would not do to let them partake too heartily of food after their long abstinence.

"It wouldn't be prudent, you know, my boy," he continued, "to tell you all I've gone through with, for ye'd get excited and excitement is a species of intoxication—is a species of madness. Take my advice, lad, and don't get drunk."

"There's very little chance of doing so out here on the ocean, I fancy," said Van, with a smile.

The old fellow winked, and then went on to illustrate his maxim by a story, a favorite practice of his.

"I'll tell you what happened to Ben Briggs, chief mate of the Sarah, as trim a whaling bark as ever you see. Ben was a great drinker, he was. He come from Providence, which is in the State of Rhode Island; some folks say nowhere else."

"That's wrong, Chipps, for our meeting you was a providence, surely."

"Wull, as I was sayin', Ben Briggs could drink like a horse. Why, when he got hold of a bottle of rum, it lasted so quick, as the Injun said, that you'd a been surprised to see it. Well, sir, that man actooally dranked hisself to death, he did."

"Did he die young?"

"Why, he was in an eternal pickle from drinking so much, and you could smell his breath, if the wind was favorable, for half a mile. He'd drink anything, he would; it didn't matter what, from nitro-glycerine to the best French brandy."

"Turpentine, too?"

"No, for that wouldn't get him drunk quick enough, but he'd go into a 'pothecary's, order a dozen bottles of Jamaicy ginger, and drink 'em down one arter the other."

"I should think it would burn his stomach out," said Van, surprised at the story, which, although put into the mouth of Chipps, is an actual fact, as the author can testify.

"Burn his stomick? No, indeed, it was fire-proof. Wull, sir, that man, he went on drinking, getting boiling drunk every day of his life, until he finally died at the age of a hundred."

"What?"

"Fack, and all 'cause he would drink. Shows the bad effects of rum. Don't ye never drink it, lad."

"But that's an extraordinary age, Mr. Chipps. You can't say that drinking shortened this man's life."

"Yes, I kin. Ef he'd a let rum alone, with his strong constitution and cheerful ways, he'd a lived to a been two hundred, if not more; but he would drink, and the consequences was he died an early death, missed by all, and partic'ly the rum-sellers, which he allus hung up."

"Hung up?"

"Yes, put 'em down on the slate, made 'em keep the 'counts in their heads, so's he could come round the next day and kick 'em out."

Van laughed, and Chipps being anything but temperate when he began spinning yarns, went on to enforce his moral still more.

"Why, there was my old captain on the Snowflake," he said, "all the fuss he made was on account o' drink. He wouldn't let the men have any, and they mutinied."

"How could rum cause that, if they didn't have any?"

"Why, if they'd a had it in moderation, they wouldn't a rebelled. I tell ye, lad, rum is a great curse—when ye can't get all ye want!"

"Ah, Mr. Chipps, I'm afraid you are not as strong a temperance man as you'd have me believe."

"Why, yes, I am. Rum causes nine-tenths of all the crime what's done; fills the pawn shops, poperlates the jails and lunatic asylums, makes all the misery there is, ruins thousands, makes men crazy, poor, wretched, dirty, thieving, contemptible vagabonds, that's what it does."

"I believe you, Mr. Chipps."

"Course it does. It takes away a man's self-respect, deprives him of many a square meal, snatches the shirt off his back and the shoes from his feet, puts mortgages onto his house and blossoms on his nose, unsteadies his character—and his legs, builds palaces for gin-millers, while the customer has to take an airy lodging on a door-step. I tell ye, strong drink is a cuss."

Van assented, and Chipps waxed eloquent, bringing forward many convincing arguments against intemperance, and quite surprising all hands by his comprehensive grasp of the subject.

Night came on, and while the three companions slept under the shelter of the little cabin, Chipps kept watch, tending the sail and the steering gear, and heading well up into the wind.

At two o'clock he called Harlowe, the latter being the only real sailor in the party besides Chipps, and the former mate remained awake until morning.

He thought that Chipps acted very strangely, his walk being very unsteady, and his enunciation decidedly thick and indistinct, but he soon forgot about it, and never thought of it again until the sun arose above the sea, when he looked in upon the eccentric fellow for the purpose of waking him.

He got one good whiff at the man's breath, and if it wasn't rum which scented it, he did not know the smell of the article.

Chipps was not easily aroused, and when he was there was no mistaking his condition, for he was as drunk as a lord, as he would have said himself.

There was no denying the fact, but what puzzled Harlowe was not that Chipps should get drunk immediately after delivering a temperance lecture, but where he got the liquor, for he had not been able to discover anything spirituous aboard the raft.

However, drunk or not, Chipps was just as jolly as ever, and was the life of the party all that day, though Van was sadly chagrined at seeing his condition until the funny fellow got him into a good humor by his quaint remarks and his tenderness and kindly care, of which the lad still stood in great need.

All day they kept on, the weather being propitious and the heat of the sun, tempered by the cooling breeze, which, now that they had water and food in abundance, seemed to infuse new life into them all, instead of parching their throats and drying up their blood, as it had done before.

After all, delightful as the sea is under many, and perhaps most, circumstances, there are occasions when a seaman's life is not a bed of roses by any means, and he is in no mood for seeing the ever-changing beauties of sea and sky.

It is delightful to go bounding over the waves, with all sail set and the wind blowing briskly just over the quarter, the bright side of life on the ocean, and now came the reverse, with the spray dashing in shimmering clouds around the bow, and the porpoises sporting all around you.

It is a different matter, though, when these same waves are tossed into mighty billows by the angry winds, when the drenching clouds of spray reach to the very mastheads, when the laboring bark goes plunging headlong into the black waters or rolls helplessly in the trough of the sea, when masts are rent asunder like twigs, and sails are torn to atoms in a moment, when all around is black and hideous, and death seems threatening in every gust and every billow.

So with the little party of castaways; they had seen the bright side of life on the ocean, and now came the reverse.

Toward noon the clouds began to thicken, the wind blew in fitful gusts, seagulls wheeled around and around in the air, shrieking and uttering discordant cries, while afar off the waves could be seen, dotted all over with white caps.

"What are those little birds yonder?" cried Van, suddenly. "How pretty they look—and see! they almost go under the waves as they swoop down."

"Storm petrels," said Harlowe, briefly.

"Mother Cary's chickens," added Chipps, "what makes their nests on the waves, so sailors say, and like that kind of weather the best which brings storm and shipwreck to poor Jack Tars."

"I have heard they were birds of ill luck," said Merton, gloomily. "It seems that our troubles are not yet over."

"Don't abuse the poor petrels," said Harlowe, "for did they not appear we should have no warning of the storms which sweep over the ocean."

"They're a bad lot," said Merton; "they bring storms and hurricanes."

"No, they do not bring, but give warning of, the storms. I would not have the petrels banished by any means, for they always give one time to prepare for danger."

"Like rattlesnakes, eh?" said Merton. "Tell you what's coming, and then let you have it, hot and heavy."

CHAPTER X.

THE CURRENT.

"I think it will be as well to take in our sail and strengthen our lashings, Mr. Chipps," said Harlowe, without taking time to answer the gloomy Merton. "What do you say?"

"Not a bad——" Ha! lively there, my lads, for there she comes in good earnest. Look out for yourselves, first of all. Our lives are of more importance to us than the sail is. Hang on tight, my boy, for there'll be no getting ye back if ye fall into them waves."

His caution was well timed, for in an instant, almost without warning, the storm broke upon them in all its violence.

The sail was blown from its fastenings in a moment, and with a report like a cannon flapped and fluttered in the wind until it was ragged and torn to shreds.

The mast quivered, but released from the strain which the sail would have brought upon it, held firm in its place, the halyards singing and whistling as the wind caught them.

The raft was fortunately strong and well built, so that there was no danger of its going to pieces, the bulwarks which Chipps had constructed doing much to save the party from a thorough drenching.

On they swept over the billowy ocean, the long, heavy swell seeming to carry them forward with great rapidity; the spray dashing as high as the top of the mast, and just escaping them.

Van went into the little cabin and lay down, Chipps remaining at the helm, and keeping the head of his craft well up into the wind, and although he had no sails to steady it by, maintained a tolerably straight course.

Harlowe and Merton strengthened the lashings about the casks, boxes and other movable things on deck, taking particular care to secure the galley, in which had been stored the most of the fresh provisions.

Thus on and on they flew, the wind howling around them, the waves, all white with foam, rolling beneath them, the clouds gathering thicker and thicker over their heads, and the whole boundless ocean spreading away on all sides, presenting a scene of awful desolation never equaled on land.

Guided by an unseen hand, the mysterious force of the ocean currents, they swept on and on toward that strange region where they were destined to remain for so long, and where wonders would appear that they had never dreamed of.

Carried onward by a mysterious power, or perhaps by a combination of them, they were now on their way to that strange land, which is both sea and meadow, whose area extends that of the whole Mississippi valley, where the ocean seems to store up its rubbish; where wind and rain are rarely met with, and where whatever enters stays to rot and crumble to dust, forgotten and neglected.

All the rest of that day the gale lasted, so that it was impossible to get up what sail there still remained, if haply the waves contained any, and they were forced to go whither the winds and currents would take them.

The danger of being swamped was happily over and the four men could enjoy some degree of comfort, the motion of the raft being far less violent than before.

Night came, and although the wind was not so strong, the raft was still driving forward at a more rapid rate than the circumstances would seem to warrant.

Watch was kept that night by all except Van, the boy being far from strong; but as there was little to do, one man only stood watch alone, letting the others sleep.

The morning when the sun rose the breeze was quite moderate, and yet the raft, with no sail up, kept steadily on at her former rate of speed, a good four knots in the hour.

At breakfast, prepared by Chipps, and eaten with a relish, the good-natured seaman proposed that they should go to sail-making for a while.

He began to look through his stores, humming softly to himself, and after a long search, during which nothing like sail-cloth appeared, his face began to grow red.

His eyes then fell on a piece of canvas, and he gave way to a look of bewilderment, and this in turn to one of indignation, and finally to a look of despair.

"There's no use trying to hide the fact, my friend," he said, looking out on deck and lifting up a coil of rope. "We've got to make a shift to make a shift, or a shilly."

"Then we shall have to do without a sail?"

"Exactly. What extry sail-cloth we had went to make a shroud for the poor man what died, and the sails that blowed away was the only ones left."

"There's no use trying to hide the fact, my friend," said Merton. "Take that."

"Won't do; it's thick with paint and soot, and we want it besides."

"We are going along pretty well without any sail," remarked Van. "I don't see as we are so badly off, after all. See how the waves ripple."

"You don't feel very much wind, do you?" asked Harlowe.

"No."

"Take the canvas out of our bunks," said Merton. "We have sails."

"Can't do it," said Chipps.

Nothing more was said, and the raft floated on at the same even pace all the morning, Van reading one of the books which Chipps had saved, and the latter preparing dinner as unconcerned as though he were aboard ship, and there was nothing to disturb him.

The wind died nearly out by noon, but the speed of the raft seemed to have abated nothing, a steady rate of four knots being kept up.

No mention was made of this fact during dinner time, and after the meal was dispatched, Merton lay down in the shade and went to sleep. Van busied himself with his book once more, and Chipps, after washing up his coppers and utensils, lit his pipe and sat upon his bench, calmly smoking.

Presently Harlowe entered, and, sitting down alongside of Chipps, said quietly, as if that had been his only purpose in entering:

"Give me a bit of fire, cook."

He lit his pipe, puffed away a few minutes, and then asked

"What d'ye think of the weather?"

"Mod'rate and pleasant, not much wind and none too warm for comfort."

"Look here, cook," said Harlowe, suddenly dropping his careless tone, "you know just as well as I that we are in a bad strait, and that even if we had a sail it could do us but lit good."

"Maybe so," returned Chipps, without removing his pipe from his lips.

"You know as well as I that we are in one of the great currents, which is bearing us on at the rate of four good knots an hour."

"We couldn't do that without any wind. Guess you're right."

"You know it, and making up your mind that there was help for us, you have philosophically resolved to say nothing. What current is it?"

"It might be the equatorial, or the Humboldt. Yes, I guess it must be the Japanese nor yet the Humboldt. Yes, I guess it must be the Japanese nor yet the Humboldt."

"Don't try to fool me, old fellow. It is the equatorial current. Do you know what becomes of it?"

"Wull, I ain't much of a scholar, but I've been told it loses itself somewhere off the northern coast of Africa, swirls around and around, and, with a part of the Gulf Stream, runs around and around ag'in on the outside of the West Indies, between the West Indies and the Spanish Main."

"And it is altogether likely that we may drift into the outer branches of this current and get carried into the huge basin you speak of?"

"It might happen as you say. Here, take a light; you've your pipe go out talking so much."

Harlowe relighted his pipe, puffed away until there was a red glow in the bowl, and said:

"It is the current, then, that is influencing our course, determining our fate, perhaps. The likelihood of meeting vessels now is slight?"

"Very."

"There are four of us, with food enough to last——"

"Seven or eight months wi' mod'ration."

"And then?"

"Wull, you nor I nor nobody knows what then, as the book says; so don't let's worrit. The current has got to take care of us. Gimme a light, and I'll be out."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WIND.

"What a lot of trouble!" cried Van, leaning on the side of the cabin two or three minutes after, and "I didn't know there was so much in the whole ocean."

"You'll see more by and by," said Harlowe, "that's what you'll see."

The wind was blowing by in large patches, with large gaps

there a gap of water as far as the eye could reach, the color being generally a reddish yellow, with an occasional green or brown spot to break the monotony.

"Where does it all come from?" asked Van, after looking at the floating masses, which looked like meadows set adrift.

"Oh, it grows, and it gets washed by the ocean currents and gathers in big patches like this. There ain't very much of it here, as Merton says, and if I ain't mistaken we shall see more of it before the week is out."

"Why don't you tell him that we won't see anything else by and by?" asked Merton savagely, looking out from under his shaggy eyebrows. "Why don't you tell him that we are hopelessly adrift, and that these floating meadows are destined to be the graves of us all? That would be better than holding out hope only to have it disappointed."

"'Twouldn't be mod'rate," said Chipps, coolly. "Breakfast is ready, and you better take a good cup of strong coffee. There's nothing like it for driving away the blues."

"I haven't got the blues," said the other, fiercely. "I'm not much of a sailor, but I know what the presence of so much weed in this part of the ocean means as well as you do. Curse you, it was an evil day when you came across us."

The old rage was coming upon him, and there was no telling to what excesses he might go in his fury.

As before, when crazed by thirst, he was as likely as not to kill one of his comrades; and Chipps was no more safe from his rage than Harlowe or Van, toward whom his anger had formerly been directed.

"Calm yourself, Merton," said Harlowe, laying a hand upon his shoulder. "We none of us know what is in store for us, and we must resign ourselves patiently to whatever comes."

"You are a sailor, and are used to the sea and love it," rejoined Merton. "I am not, and the dreary monotony of waves and sky is horrible to me. The sea has ever been a treacherous foe when I have trusted myself upon it, and I am suspicious of it."

"There is not much here to cause alarm," said Van; "no gales, no huge waves, no tempests."

"The calms at sea are sometimes more terrible than the tempests," answered the man. "Heaven help you, boy, but there is much trouble in store for you, and if I mistake not none of us shall ever behold the land again."

During the day Merton sat moody and silent upon the deck in the shade, or stretched himself out and slept. Chipps went about his accustomed work as usual, and Van, when he was not reading, came out to watch the drifting weed.

The patches grew denser, the straits between being less frequent, and acres upon acres of the floating meadows stretched away, red and green.

The raft floated through it, and Van picked up great bunches which he examined carefully, finding numerous little crabs feeding upon it, and sometimes a tiny fish caught in the branches.

"Gulf weed. There is a botanical name, but I don't know it. You might possibly find it in one of Chipps' books. There is one that treats of the wonders of the ocean, I believe."

"And shall we see more of this weed?"

"Undoubtedly."

Do you know where we are drifting?"

"I can guess."

"Where?"

"Don't ask me now, Van. It will be time enough by and by."

In two days more the weed had greatly increased, the area being not only more extensive, but the mass considerably thicker than before, so that at times the raft made slow progress through it.

"We have left the current," said Harlowe to Chipps, as they side by side in the galley after dinner.

"Or it has left us. What a lot of the weed there is. There'll be bigger fishes in it before long, I reckon."

I know what you are thinking of. We may have to eat these fish."

"Well, they ain't bad eatin', and are a good sight better than shin'. I wouldn't mind a good fat porpoise or dolphin, but I reckon there won't be any."

"How much water is there left?" asked Harlowe, impatiently.

"Consid'able, and it may rain afore long."

"In the calm belt? Not likely!"

"Now, you mustn't be intemp'rate in your speech, 'cause it ain't good. Why, there was Bill Gunn, a fellow I knowed: just see what lick he done for him."

"Another lecture?" asked Van, putting his head in at the door.

"Sit down and listen. This 'ere Bill Gunn, he used to be a fish, and he a-having to work on the railroad, too."

"That fellow, he made a hundred dollars a week, and he was all on account o' rum—he had fifteen or twenty dollars saved up to leave his widder."

"Where is your moral for that?" asked Van, with a laugh.

"Where is it?" said Chipps, scratching his head and looking puzzled.

"Yes; it will be hard to find, I take it."

"Not a bit, my lad. The moral is jist here: If he hadn't a-drunked and had saved his money, he'd a-lived longer and had forty thousand saved up. I tell you rum's a cuss."

Then the queer old fellow gave one of his lectures upon temperance, which quite edified his hearers, and in the evening he was so drunk that he could hardly stand up! though where he had got his liquor, out there on the wide ocean, was a mystery, for neither Van nor any one else had discovered any aboard the raft.

Two days more passed by, and the mass of weed still increased, the weather being calm, and but little wind prevailing.

Occasionally, to pass away the time, the friends would get out the oars, push the drift aside, and propel the raft through the water, thick with the floating weed, now and then a broad patch of open water occurring when the progress was naturally faster than among the weed.

One evening after supper the two sailors were sitting together as they often did, when Harlowe said:

"Your firewood is about gone, cook. What are you going to do?"

"There might be some drift-wood among all this weed, and the sun would dry it. I are got a boat-hook, you know."

"Come, come, man, out with it. You know where we are drifting now."

"It might be the grassy sea, and that's a big place."

"Whence there is no escape. Do you know its extent?"

"Four or five hundred thousand square miles, perhaps more. Is that about right?"

"Yes, and ships rarely pass through it."

"Well, we can stay here, can't we?"

"Stay in the grassy sea?"

"Certain. 'Tis calm and pleasant, and they is old hulks floatin'—"

"And rafts with skeletons upon them," groaned Harlowe, "and ships that come here, fall to pieces and are forgotten, as we shall be, for the place is the very Valley of the Shadow of Death."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SARGASSO!

One noon, four days later, Van came out to see if Chipps had got dinner ready, when, looking over the rail, he cried suddenly:

"Why, look! there's a bit of a wreck, some vessel's house and life-rail. By George! and there's a foretop with cross-trees and a bit of mast sticking up as though the ship had just gone down."

"And just when my firewood has given out," said Chipps. "How lucky! Get out the axes, Mr. Harlowe. Van, you take the boat-hook and fasten on to that 'ere stick while we chop it up."

"Some poor wretches sent adrift into this ghastly region may chop our raft up some day," muttered Merton; "it's more than likely."

No one paid any attention to the man's gloomy remarks, for all were interested in getting the drift-wood aboard, and the three busied themselves, pulling in, chopping and splitting until quite a goodly pile of fuel lay upon the deck exposed to the sun to dry and be fit for the stove.

Later in the afternoon Van saw more of the drift, this time a dismantled hulk, the decks sprung and twisted by long exposure to the sun, the tar having all run out of the seams, the sides covered with green fungus, and the whole slowly rotting away.

No name was to be seen on the wreck, and Van gazed sadly on it as he pictured the gallant ship dancing merrily over the ocean, the hearts of all on board light and joyous, and now, this poor wreck speaking of privation and death, a watery grave and oblivion.

The next day they passed quite close to a vessel, newer and fresher than the last, the masts partly standing and the sails still hanging over the sides, mildewed and rotten.

"What sort of a region is this?" cried the boy; "a hiding place for old wrecks?"

"You may well say so, Van," rejoined Harlowe. "This is Neptune's rubbish closet, and thither the currents bring all refuse of the ocean to rot and fall into the sea at last remembered, uncared for."

"And the place is—"

"The great Sargasso Sea of the Atlantic Ocean. There are

other masses, similar to this, in the Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic, but none of them equals this in size."

"Why do you think we are in the Sargasso Sea? Have you a chart?"

"Chipp's has. Look around you. What do you see?"

"Miles and miles of seaweed, here and there a floating wreck, in the distance what seems a dismantled ship, a few flocks of noisy birds, the hot sun shining over all, an air of the most terrible desolation hanging over it, and not a sign of human life in all the dreary scene besides ourselves."

"And this is the sea of grass, which the sailors of Columbus thought marked the limit of navigation. From the earliest times it has been here, and ages hence it will still be in its place, unless the ocean currents change, which is not likely."

"And do the currents make it?"

"Partly; though the weed grows naturally in the sea water, and by no means all of it is brought here. You have seen sticks and light objects thrown into a tub or basin, and the water set in motion?"

"Often, and when I was a little fellow I used to watch how the rubbish would all go to the middle, where there was the least motion."

"It is the same thing here. You have this immense basin between two continents, and two mighty streams rushing in contrary directions, causing the whirling motion. This basin is the calm centre, and here come all the bits of wreck, masses of weed and other floating things which the great currents do not carry ashore."

"And it will always be here?"

"While the world lasts."

"And once here——"

Harlowe was about to speak when Merton stepped forward, pointed to a rotting hulk in the distance, and said:

"There is the emblem of our fate! We have come here but to die! A stanch ship enters this accursed spot, she swims around and around lazily, her masts melt away, her seams open, her decks whiten and crumble away under the gleaming sun, little by little she sinks beneath the waves or rots and falls into dust upon the ever moving weed. Annihilation is the lot of all that comes into this sea of death, whether human or inanimate."

"Be more moderate," said Chipps. "We may get out of this ere yet, so don't ye be frettin', Van. It's a big place, I know; but it may be providential after all that we've come here. No one kin tell."

"Look at yonder ship," said Merton, pointing to the one they had recently come upon. "She seems in good condition, and cannot have been wrecked. Her masts are nearly all standing and her sails are there yet."

The raft in a few minutes drifted right against this ship, and Chipps made fast a warp to a lanyard that had been snapped off and hung over the side.

"Suppose we go aboard," he said. "We mought find suthin' that would be of use to us."

"Let's look at her name," said Van. "I don't believe it's rubbed out."

The boy went to the end of the raft, and by straining his neck could just make out the ship's name in tarnished gold letters on the stern.

"She's called the Vampire, but I can't tell where she comes from," he cried, upon making the discovery.

"A bird of evil omen," muttered the gloomy Merton. "I'll warrant that she does not belie her name. None but the devil's ships call themselves by such unholy titles."

"Make the warp fast there, Van," said Harlowe, "and we will go aboard. It won't do to have our raft float away from us, even if we have found a ship."

Van took an extra turn of the warp, and then Merton scrambled up the side of the vessel, followed by Harlowe, with an ax in his hand.

Van was given a lift by Chipps, and then the jolly cook himself followed the rest, bringing an ax with him, as well as Harlowe.

"The hatches are all down," said Harlowe, "and the cabin doors closed tight."

"Let's open 'em," cried Chipps, walking aft. "Perhaps we can find the log."

The doors leading to the cabin were evidently barred upon the inside, for they would not open when Chipps put his hand upon the knob.

"What a horrible smell!" said Van; "what is it? It seems to come from the hatches."

"I don't like the looks of the ship at all," said Harlowe. "It seems to me like——"

Merton suddenly snatched the ax from out of Harlowe's hand, cut away the battens upon the main hatch, ripped off the tarpaulins, and threw one of the hatches down into the hold.

At once there arose the most horrible stench that can be

ceived, as though a plague had broken forth; and Merton, turning as pale as death, fell upon the deck, the ax dropping from his grasp, while in the most terror-stricken accents he gasped:

"Mercy on us! I said she would not belie her name. She is a slaver, and the hold is crowded with rotting carcasses of dead negroes!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SLAVER.

At this terrible announcement Harlowe turned pale, but springing forward, he seized Merton and dragged him away from the open hatch whence the deadly effluvia from the rotting corpses seemed to rise in a cloud which could be almost seen.

"My God!" cried Harlowe, as he dragged Merton away, having cast one look into the horrible pit beneath. "They lie there in hundreds."

"Are they all dead?" asked Van, retreating to the further end of the ship, where the exhalations from the hold were not so overpowering, though even here they were frightful.

"Yes; the very air is poison. I would not be thrown down into that sickening pit for all the wealth of Africa."

"Charcoal is a good thing to take out the stench," said Chipps, "or even lime. We might find something aboard which would kill that awful smell."

"Better scuttle the ship or burn it," said Harlowe. "Shall we enter the cabin?"

"Death may lurk there, too," muttered Merton. "This stench is frightful. We had better set fire to the accursed bark."

"And make it worse," retorted Chipps. "Here, gimme the ax."

With one blow he smashed in the door, and descended a short companionway, followed by Van and Harlowe, finding nothing in the outer cabin to cause any alarm.

The air was hot and close on account of the place having been shut up so long, but that was all, and closing the outer door so as to keep out the stench from the hold, Harlowe tried the door which he saw just in front.

It yielded to his touch, and he pushed it open, recoiling with horror at the very next moment.

The dead body of a man, covered with clotied blood, was seated before a pine table, upon which rested his head and hands, surrounded by a dark spot, which was undoubtedly dried blood.

"Smash open the cabin windows, and let us have some air," said Harlowe, and Van resolutely advanced, passed the hideous object in the chair, and dashed out the sashes of the windows, letting in a flood of pure air.

"Here's a bar'l o' charcoal," cried Chipps, suddenly, having been nosing about the cabin. "Guess the cook must ha' used it."

Then without further ado he fumbled around in the steward's pantry until he found an iron pot in which he proceeded at once to make a fire of broken bits of barrel staves.

When he had secured a hot blaze, he broke up some good-sized pieces of charcoal and put them on the fire.

Then he carried the pot outside, and set it on the deck, laying several large sticks of charcoal on top in a manner that would cause them to ignite, and yet not smother the flames beneath them.

A dense cloud of smoke soon arose, and to a great degree killed the stench from the hold, though it was still unbearable if one went too near the mouth of that death-pit.

Meanwhile, Van and Harlowe had been exploring the cabins, and had found the captain's log-book, a case of arms, and ammunition enough to last some time.

The vessel was a slaver, as they had supposed, and had had an eventful history, as the diary of the captain testified.

This man's name was Dominick Main, and he had been a slaver for many years, this last voyage, had it been successful, being the best he had ever made.

He had got his slaves at Congo for almost nothing, and set sail for Cuba. When three days out the men mutinied, and a pitched battle occurred on deck, in which at least a dozen were killed.

The mate, an evil fellow called Gregoire, a Frenchman, had been at the bottom of the trouble, and against him the captain was particularly bitter, disputes occurring constantly between the two, ending fatally at last.

To add to their troubles, the plague broke out among the slaves, and spread to the sailors, five dying in a single day, their bodies being thrown overboard.

As they swept into the equatorial current a storm caught them, and the vessel was disabled, the men being unable to do any hard work on account of sickness.

The hatches were battened down securely, as the slaves had already made one nearly successful attempt at escape, and the poor fellows were imprisoned below in the foul air of the hold.

The storm swept many of the remaining sailors overboard, where they became food for the sharks, their despairing cries ringing in the ears of their comrades.

The Vampire drifted with the current; the captain, locked in the cabin by the treacherous Gregoire, being unable to take command.

He had been badly wounded by the mutinous Frenchman, and it was from these hurts that he died, writing out the last pages of his record while his strength remained.

The mate had fled, he knew not whither, and the men with him, if there were any left, for he had called repeatedly to them, and had listened without hearing a sound.

By the dates of his last entries the castaways found that it was about two weeks since the captain had died, and the Vampire must have entered the Sargasso at that time.

"Good Heavens!" cried Van, suddenly, "the villainous Gregoire may, like ourselves, be wandering in this place of desolation."

"It is not likely," said Harlowe, quietly. "Let us look about us some more. We may find what we want in the tool-chest."

"If you want an auger," said Chipps, suddenly appearing, "I've got one, and a stock. I got it from our own craft."

"Then let us get out what we want and scuttle the ship."

"You won't go down in the hold?"

"No, but in the run. We can work on the outside, too."

When they went on deck they found that Merton had been in the fore-castle, where two dead men were discovered, the poor unfortunates having evidently died from the plague.

Van, in one of his trips from the raft to the Vampire's cabin, came across a chest containing gold, and this they emptied, taking the bags to the raft and depositing them in a place of safety.

"What mockery!" muttered the taciturn Merton; "gold in such a place. Of what use is it in the grassy sea?"

"We don't intend to stay here all our lives," answered Chipps; "and gold in moderation is a good thing to have about."

When everything that was of use to them had been taken from the slaver, Merton descended into the run, which was first thoroughly fumigated, and bored three or four good-sized holes in the bottom of the ill-fated vessel.

Van and Chipps had been at work upon the outside in the meantime, and before long the Vampire began to settle perceptibly, the water pouring in great jets through the holes that had been made.

"We will soon see the last of the slaves," said Van, "and I am not sorry."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CALM.

Before leaving the deck of the Vampire for the last time, Harlowe secured the cabin doors, and with the assistance of Chipps and Van, for Merton would do nothing, covered over the open hatchway with sail-cloth and fastened it down by rolling a spare yard across.

When the vessel came to sink, the dead bodies would naturally rise and float upon the surface if the hatchway was left open, and as one of the hatches was in the hold there was no other way to close it and prevent the horrible objects from being strewn upon the waters, to breed pestilence and death.

When everything had been done the party hastily retreated to the raft, and, cutting loose, pushed away, for the slaver was sinking rapidly, and they did not care to be swamped when she went down.

Chipps had carelessly overturned the pot of burning charcoal, and the deck, as dry as tinder, was soon in a blaze, the flames spreading rapidly, and very nearly cutting off Van's retreat.

Harlowe sprang to the boy's assistance, and they both escaped in safety, pushing off as soon as they got on board the raft.

The flames spread very rapidly, the vessel being soon wrapped in a sheet of fire and smoke.

The water made as good progress as the flames, however, and by the time the castaways had gone three cables' lengths the deck was level with the ocean.

Propelling the raft through the thick masses of weed, an open space occurring now and then, they made good progress, and were out of danger when, with a sudden plunge and hiss, the ill-starred vessel sank beneath the waves and disappeared forever.

surface, but, striking into an open channel of considerable length, rowed steadily, the cook merely pausing once to look back over his shoulder and say:

"Wull, that 'ere is the last of those poor critters. Corry, how they did smell! The stench sticks in my nostrils yet. Wull, slavin' is a godless trade, whatever ye kin say, and the fate o' that cap'n was deserved."

"And the Frenchman?" asked Merton. "Shall we meet him?"

"What Frenchman?" asked Harlowe, not knowing that Merton knew anything about him.

"Gregory, or whatever else he calls himself; I know all about him. It will be just our luck to run across the frog-eating hound."

"You must be more mod'rate, my friend," said Chipps, or ye'll git the reputation of bein' a Jonah. I animadvert as how you've read the Scriptures enough to know who Jonah was?"

Van laughed at the cook's queer expression, but Merton only sulked and said nothing; presently, throwing down his oar, saying:

"I'm going to sleep. 'Tis the only comfort a man can have in this horrible place."

As he went off and lay down in the shade, Harlowe said, drawing in his oar:

"You can go and finish your book, if you like, Van, as there is no particular use for us to row any longer, and I fancy Mr. Chipps wants to see after our supper."

"'Tis pretty near the 'propriate time, for our incursions to that fateful bark occupied considerable of the afternoon, and the sun is rushing down the west, as the poetry book says."

That night the two counselors sat upon the rail in the moon-light smoking, Van and Merton being fast asleep, and Harlowe, after a few puffs, said gravely:

"How long is this calm to last, friend Chipps?"

"Well, friend Harlowe, we are in the neighborhood o' the Tropic o' Cancer, there or thereabouts, and a sailor like you must know they's calms running along that region, and it ain't often that it rains."

"Had we better go through or across the Sargasso?"

"It can't make much difference. You're a navigator, and you know just about how fur it is either way, and there's small odds. We ain't got sails, and we can't row all the distance."

"Then we are doomed to spend out lives here?"

"Pre-haps. Any rate, we're safe from bein' wrecked or swamped down here, and up to the nuth'ard or east'ard we'd have winds and storms. When we get a ship it'll be time to talk of gettin' away."

"How much water is there left?"

"You've got a sudden way o' puttin' questions, you have. They's enough fresh water, if that's what ye mean to intimate, to last us without stint for two weeks."

"And after that?"

"If the calm continues, we shall have to drink grog—allus providin' we can obtain it."

"I have known the agony of thirst once, and I pray to Heaven that I may be spared the experience again. Come what will, that boy shall not suffer. I would throw myself into the ocean first."

"And give up the trust his poor father left you? You promised to look after the lad."

"And so I will. Listen, for what I say is important. When the rain comes we must fill everything we have and take care that no water is wasted. We have not a flowing spring where we can go and draw whatever we want at any time."

"Not much."

"We are in a desert, with water all around us, but none to drink, and without that, food, though we had an abundance, is useless to support life."

The dreadful calm continued for days and days, the raft seeming scarcely to move, being, like the bark of the Ancient Mariner,

"As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean."

The waves were green and slimy, fungi formed upon the sides of the raft, birds ceased to appear, the very air seemed to stand still, the sun rose in a hot mist and sank into a seething caldron; the heat was unbearable, and the slightest exertion produced immediate fatigue.

Merton fretted and fumed as the days passed and the horrible calm continued, Harlowe fearing that he would go mad.

"Of what use is gold?" he cried one day, tearing open a bag that he had secreted, and throwing the glittering pieces into the air.

"See!" he shrieked; "I would give all these for a breath of the gale upon my cheek. Give me water! My throat is parched."

The water, cooled upon by the powerful dew, had turned

green and slimy, and was scarcely fit to drink, the supply, of course, giving out much sooner than Chipps had anticipated.

At last they were unable to drink it, and food became distasteful to them, the appetite craving water, and being satisfied with nothing else.

And in the midst of all their sufferings there came no sign of rain, no ray of hope, and they were almost ready to leap into the water and put an end to their agony.

Merton grew delirious, and had to be carefully watched lest he should take his own or another's life, for he knew not what he said or did, and raved constantly.

And thus the horrible calm continued, until, in his despair, poor Van fell upon his knees and cried aloud:

"Oh, God! let me die at once rather than suffer this agony. Have pity, and send the blessed rain!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WANDERER.

The poor boy's prayer was not to remain unanswered, for that very night a refreshing shower fell, and the castaways knew the blessed sensation which water produces when one's throat is dry and parched.

Chipps gathered several bucketfuls of the water and carefully saved it, but the clouds, when once they had proved themselves propitious, were not niggardly with their supplies, and during the next two of three days the casks and barrels were all filled, the precaution being taken to throw two or three handfuls of powdered charcoal into each cask.

The breeze once more blew cool and refreshing, the raft glided through the water, the birds appeared, fishes leaped from the mass of weed, and all was life and motion.

"I'll tell you what," said Chipps, one afternoon, when he and Van had chopped up a lot of drift-wood which they had come across, "there's nothing like water after all, in moderate quantities, and we've got lots of it."

"Better than rum?" asked Van, quizzingly.

"Certain. Talkin' o' rum, there was the cap'n of the Sea Gull as could drink more toddy than ye ever seed. He would dilute his water with it, associate it with his coffee, fry his passengers in it, have rum sauce to his puddin's, stew his kidneys in rum, have rum omelettes, rum slapjacks and rum in his milk.

"In fact, it was rum in everything that went down his gullet from morning to night, not counting between whiles, and then it was rum again. Why, one day the cook grabbed up the captain's gun to shoot a gull with, when bless me if he didn't shoot out a pocket pistol what the old man had stuck there for safety!

"That 'ere bird got hit in the head and was made so drunk with the grog that it fell right down onto the deck and flopped around like a fellow with three sheets in the wind.

"They wasn't a mark of bullet or powder onto her, and she wasn't hurt, on'y made drunk with the cap'n's rum, so's the cook just walked up and collared her as putty as you please, and in two minutes that 'ere circumnavigating bird was as dead as rats.

"There was the cuss of rum, for if that pocket pistol hadn't been in the gun, old Slush would no more ha' hit that gull than he'd a-flown, for he was no marksman and couldn't hit a flock o' houses at ten paces.

"There's one moral, and I can give you another off the same piece. The cap'n was drunk so much that he didn't have time to fight and maintain proper discipline, whereas, on the contrary as I maintain, if it hadn't been for rum he'd 'ave licked every critter aboard and got 'em all so scared that 'ere wouldn't 've been a better disciplined ship in the hull of a merchant marine, even if every man aboard had two black eyes and all his teeth knocked down his throat. There was discipline sacrificed, ye see, and all on account o' too much rum."

The days lengthened into weeks, the weeks into months, and all the four companions were drifting wearily through the sea of grass, four or five months having now elapsed since the meeting with Chipps.

Van spent the most of his time in reading, the cabin of the Vampire having furnished him with several additional books, among which, strange to relate, was a Bible, as much out of place in such a vessel as the devil would be in a church.

One night Van suddenly started up from the little cabin where he was lying down in a sort of half-doze, and, coming to himself, he said quickly:

"Was that you singing, Mr. Chipps?"

"Singin'! Why, ye couldn't git a chirrup out o' me any more than ye could out'n a bullfrog. I ain't got what you might call a musical voice."

"Was it you, Mr. Harlowe?"

"No, indeed. There was no singing by any one."

"But I heard it distinctly. The words were strange to me, but the air was quite familiar. I think it is French."

"Are you sure?" asked Harlowe, thoughtfully. "You may have been dreaming and imagined that you heard it."

"But I know that—There!"

As the boy spoke there came the sound of music across the dreary waste, and a man's voice was heard singing in clear, distinct tones the national anthem of France.

"The Marseillaise Hymn" muttered Harlowe. "Do you hear anything, my friend?"

"I do, as sure as preaching, and if there was anything to drink out in this 'ere wilderness of woe, I should say I was drunk."

"Hark!"

The effect of the music as it came floating over the water was most weird and unnatural, for it could not be possible that there were other human beings in this desolate waste, and, least of all, that they should be singing.

Had not all four heard the sounds, for Merton was now awake, and listening with all his soul, it might be doubted that they were real; but it was not possible that they could all have been deceived.

"Who is that singing?" growled Merton. "I want to get a nap."

"You'll have to go out there and see the feller yourself, then," answered Chipps, "for it ain't none of us."

Merton sprang to his feet, gazed at each of his companions, and then gasped huskily:

"Am I then mad? Do you hear no singing, any of you?"

"I do," said Van; "and it was I who first heard it."

"And you, Chipps, and you, Harlowe—do you hear it, both?"

"Yes," they answered.

"It is a French song—'The Marseillaise!'"

"H'm! Then I am not going mad, after all. Well, let the wretch sing, if he wants to, though it's a puzzle to me how any one can sing in this horrible place."

"Aha, he's changed his tune," cried Van, as the air of a rollicking sea song which they all knew sounded over the waters.

"Are we dreaming?" said Harlowe, in a whisper. "It cannot be possible that a man is out there, amusing himself by singing!"

"Suppose we hail him," said Van. "It must be a wanderer like ourselves, and he is singing to keep himself company."

"Don't do it," said Chipps. "It may be the old fellow himself, Davy Jones, come up to take the air."

"It can do no harm," said the former mate, in a tone of assent.

Van stood up, and, making a trumpet of his hands, shouted:

"Ahoy! Where are you—you that sing in this desolate place? Who are you?"

The song suddenly ceased, and all was still, not a sound being heard but the swish of the waves.

After a short pause Van put his hands to his mouth again, and cried, at the top of his voice:

"Why don't you answer? Who are you, and where did you come from? Are you on a ship? If so, come and pick us up."

There was no answer, and Van was about to hail again, when Merton spoke up, and said:

"Little good comes of hailing a specter; hold your peace, and let the phantom pass. It's bad luck to speak to the evil one."

"I can see no vessel," observed Harlowe; "but then the moon is not yet risen. Our man has stopped singing, and I am afraid we shall not hear him again."

"We have frightened him," said Van.

"Frighten the devil? I think not," grumbled Merton. "However, don't hail him again, for I want to sleep."

Nothing further was heard of the mysterious singing, and after waiting in vain for a long time for the song to be repeated, Van sank into a deep slumber, being shortly followed by his companions.

It was nearly sunrise when he awoke, and after dressing himself he came out to see if Chipps was about, when he suddenly heard a strange voice behind him.

He turned, and there to the right, close to the raft, was the waterlogged hull of a wrecked vessel, and leaning over the broken rail was the figure of a man, bearded, swarthy, and wearing a red night-cap on his head, talking to his friends.

"Ho, ho! eet was zou, my leetle friend, zat fright me in ze night, was eet?" said the man. "You hear my chanson and you say, 'Hello!' and zat makes me stoap. Ha, ha! I fright you, too, eh? Bien, we must be friends. Your sheep is bet-taire than mine, and so I come aboard."

It was no vision, then, but a man, a wanderer like themselves, that they had heard, and there he was coming right among them.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THIEF.

"Is this the man we heard singing last night?" asked Van of Harlowe, as the stranger began sliding down a rope, one end of which was fast to the rail.

"Yes. We came upon him this morning, and he seemed as much surprised to see us as we were to hear him."

"He heard my hail last night?"

"Yes, and was too frightened to answer; said he thought it was a ghost."

At that moment the man swung himself over into a boat alongside, and then, pulling to the raft, came aboard and said, with a smile which Van did not at all like:

"Bon jour—zat ees to say, goot-day, my friends; mes amis zis ees a fine sheep you hafe; moche better zan zat one," throwing his thumb back over his shoulder at the miserable wreck he had just left.

"What might a feller call you, Mr. Frenchman?" asked Chipps, introducing himself, and then added:

"This yer sailor-looking chap is Mr. Harlowe; the boy is Master Van Clief, though we call him Van fur short, and this other one is Merton. Glad to see a human being in this outrageous land, or, rayther, water."

"You would know my name?" said the man, with that cruel smile of his.

"That's it, 'cause I suppose you've got one, and it'll be awkward not to know what it is."

"I am Gregoire Lenoir, foorst mate of ze Vulture; ze beez trading sheep what go down in ze meedle of ze Atlantique."

Gregoire!

"That was the name of the treacherous mate," thought Van. "I'll try this fellow."

"How long is it since the Vampire was lost, did you say, Monsieur Gregoire?" the boy asked, coolly.

The Frenchman flushed deeply, and then said petulantly:

"Sacre bleu! I did not say ze Vampire. I do not know him. I said ze Vulture."

"As evil a bird as the other," spoke up Merton. "How did you leave Captain Main and the slaves?"

"Ha, what you say? Capitaine Mann and ze esclaves? I know not what you mean; I no comprend."

"Are you not Gregoire, mate of the Vampire, and did you not kill and leave the captain locked in the cabin?" said Van, growing bold.

"I kill him? Oui, I kill him, but he foorst gif me ze bad cut on ze forehead. See!"

The Frenchman pushed back his red night-cap and displayed a terrible scar right across the forehead, and extending down over the left eye to the cheek-bone, which had been left nearly bare.

"Of what account ees it, if I haf killed him?" he said, lightly. "He was a bad man, he deal in human life, he lock ze poor negres in ze hold to die and rot, he treat ze poor sailor man like dog. Eef he is dead, what mattaire now?"

"None, I suppose," said Harlowe. "How did you manage to live since leaving the Vampire? I may tell you now that she has sunk beneath the waters, she and all her ghastly cargo."

"Ha, you go aboard? You not tell me this byze magic?"

"No; we went aboard, and learned all there was to be learned from the log."

"And she is gone down?"

"Yes."

"Eh bien, it is well, she no more trouble ze poor black man. Eh bien! I haf been afraid of ze plague, and I leave. We are in ze grass already, and I take ze boat and ride through the weed, and I find zis sheep wiz some wataire and ze hard tack. Hein! I moste catch ze crab and ze fish to make out a 'nnaire."

"We can offer you better fare than that," said Harlowe, "and though you can sing amidst all this desolation, we cannot abandon you. This shall be your home as long as you choose to make it so."

"Better leave him aboard the old hulk to starve," muttered Merton between his teeth. "I like not this smiling Frenchman; he is too much like that old villain at the Cape, to whom we owe our being in this place."

"Merci," responded Gregoire, with a profusion of smiles, grimaces and shrugs. "You do me too moche honor. I kiss your hands. I haf ze famine in my estomach, and I could eat horse wiz ze harness on."

"Take it mod'rate," grunted Chipps; "'twouldn't do to be too comp'rate at eating or drinking to begin with. Temp'rance a virtue, and rum is a cuss. Be wise, and avoid intemperance, the cause of all crime, the breeder of dissensions."

"Ha! you are ze great oraclé, ze temperance apostle," said the Frenchman, with a grin; "one of ze kind who gif ze goot advice in ze evening and in ze morning is blind drunk."

"Blest if he hasn't hit off old Fatsides this time," muttered Merton. "The fellow is sharp enough, I take it. I must watch him."

The morose passenger was not the only one that indulged in watching that day, for the Frenchman, volatile as he seemed, did his share of it, and he observed many things which he was not given the credit of seeing.

Two days passed, during which they slowly drifted along, passing bits of wreckage, but seeing no more hulks or abandoned ships, though the drift-wood, in all stages of decomposition, was piled thick around them.

The days were passed in conversation and an occasional bit of fishing; the nights, when they were not asleep, in singing and story-telling, the Frenchman having an inexhaustible stock upon which to draw.

No watch was kept, as there was no danger of being run down by passing ships in this part of the sea of grass, and the utmost confidence was placed in all by all, no thought of treachery, even on the part of the Frenchman, being entertained.

The keen-eyed Gregoire had noted the belt of diamonds worn by Harlowe, and in the course of two or three days he had, by adroit questioning, learned all he wanted to know concerning it.

His eyes lit with the utmost greed when he looked at it, though he was careful to conceal his emotion, and seemed to utterly scorn riches of all sorts since they could do him no good in such a place.

Upon the third night after his coming, the party all slept particularly sound—Van in the cabin, Chipps in the galley, Merton under the shadow of the rail, well up forward, and Harlowe and Gregoire amidships.

The moon shone with great brilliancy upon the strange scene, and those on deck kept their faces covered, having the natural fear, common to all sailors, of being made moon-blind, or having their features distorted by the supposed evil influence of the goddess of night.

At daybreak Harlowe awoke, and, getting up, called Chipps, noticing for the first time that Gregoire was missing.

He awoke his companions, but nothing was to be seen of the Frenchman, nor of the boat which had been left towing astern when he came aboard the raft.

Then a sudden pallor overspread his features, and he put his hand to his waist where the belt of diamonds was always securely fastened.

"The diamonds!" he gasped. "They are gone! I have neglected my trust, I have allowed them to be stolen."

"Stolen?" repeated Van, aghast.

"Yes, and by that false-hearted Frenchman. He and the diamonds are both missing!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERPENT.

"Can he have been so base?" said Van. "Of what use will the jewels be in this place?"

"The poor fool hopes to get away, as we do," replied Merton. "It was not enough that we should be in danger of our lives from infernal machines, shipwreck and storms, hunger and thirst, pestilence and heart-sickness, but now we must have this vile thief come among us and steal that which we cannot use."

"All my poor father's fortune," said Van. "It was going to accomplish so much when we got home, and now it is gone."

"I was to blame for trusting him," interposed Harlowe. "I ought to have known better, after what we discovered about the man."

"Even I, with all my crimes, would not have done so contemptible an act," muttered Merton under his breath. "Common gratitude and the sense of our dependence upon one another, would have restrained me, and I have been none of the best. I am bad, but at least I am not as bad as that."

"Van, my boy, I have ruined you," continued Harlowe, greatly moved, "and if, by the mercy of God, we ever escape from this place, you will be penniless, when but for my negligence you would have been able to begin the world under the brightest auspices. Can you forgive me?"

"Say no more about it," replied Van, his voice choked with emotion. "We have still life and health, and what are compared to these? You cannot buy youth and health with the diamonds in the mines."

"That's good mod'rate talk," put in Chipps, "but in all things, but if I had been in all things, at about this period, I should have been a different man."

that he'd be rayther short o' breath for a spell, and after that he'd have no further employment for any of the vital sparks, as the hist'ry book says."

Van could not help smiling at this sally, and, turning to Harlowe and grasping his hand, he looked him fondly in the face and said in tones of the utmost kindness and confidence:

"If ever we do escape from this weird, unreal place and reach our beloved homes, believe me, you will never hear a word of reproach from my lips. But for you I should have perished a hundred times, and your tender care of me is worth ten times the price of any diamonds that ever sparkled."

"And the coffee is a bilin' like to split," announced Chipps. "I can't tell how much longer our supply is goin' to last, but we've got lots o' 'baccy left."

"And some seaweeds supply nicotine," said Van, who had been reading up, "though I never heard of sea coffee, so be sparing of the fragrant berry, Mr. Chipps, for we can't pick them from the weed."

"Tain't unlikely that we'll run across a ship wi' a cargo o' coffee aboard. Who'd ever thought of meeting them dead niggers? I'm sure coffee's more likely than corpses."

"So you've got fish for breakfast, have you?" remarked Van, sitting down; "and crabs, too, as I live, and big fellows. You'll be bringing us in a turtle some day."

"Fraid not, Master Van; they don't grow in this part of the Lantic, as I ever heard on, unless one might get drifted in while making his way over from Bermuda to the Azores. If I see one, I'll do my best to fish him in, never you fear."

They did not see a turtle, indeed, but something quite as interesting and vastly more exciting; the incident which follows giving them a good idea of the dangers as well as the desolateness of their position.

It was about a week after the disappearance of the thieving Frenchman, and Van, tired of reading, had come out upon deck to see if there was anything new to be seen.

"By George! look at this log," he cried, leaning over the rail. "It must be the mast of a big ship."

"Where is it?" asked Chipps.

"Almost alongside. It's quite long and thick, and covered with slime or barnacles, I don't know which."

"Maybe it's no good."

"I'll try it, anyhow," and Van got out the boat-hook and jabbed into the mast with all his might.

The effect produced was most marvellous, and totally unexpected.

There was a convulsive movement throughout the log, and then a roar like that of an enraged bull.

Then the water was violently agitated, the floating mass suddenly arose in great folds, and a monstrous head appeared above the water and darted an angry glance all around.

"Great snakes!" cried Van, "what have I stirred up, in the name of all that's marvelous?"

Chipps turned at the sound, and said:

"Heavens and airth! If I was a drinking man I should think I'd got the horrors!"

"Merciful powers! a sea-serpent!" cried Harlowe, leaping to

The creature that Van had unwittingly aroused was about seventy-five or eighty feet in length, its tail being bifurcated like that of a fish, the flukes being long, thin and very pliant, its neck sinuous and circled with glittering scales, its body thick and muscular, and its head perfectly enormous.

It raised itself in folds, and, gliding over the weed, raised its big head and twisted its arched neck around, emitting all the while a peculiar hissing or singing noise.

"Its head is as big as a water cask," said Van.

"With eyes as big as a bushel," added Chipps. "My stars! what a mouth! He would take in Jonah and his whole family without grunting."

"Look out!" cried Harlowe, "he will attack us next!"

The creature, however, whether angry or not, they did not care, seemed more anxious to show himself just then than to begin hostilities, as he slid about, now dipping beneath the waves, and then rising and puffing out green streams of water and vapor.

The body of this huge monster of the deep was of a dark green, lighter upon the belly, and mottled with deep brown spots, flecked here and there with gold upon the back, with the changing color effect seen in the dolphin.

Its head was enormous, the eyes big and prominent, the jaws armed with cruel teeth, and a mane extending from the tip of the nose along the crest of the head down to the

Altogether it was a most hideous-looking thing, and unlike any fish or animal that Van had ever seen, although since being in the grassy sea he had come across many curious specimens of the finny tribe.

Fishes whose dorsal fins moved up and down like the trigger

of a gun, remaining fixed unless pressed in a certain spot, fishes whose lateral fins ended in round points like toes, and which carried a regular pipe upon their backs, from which vapor was emitted, thus giving them the name of "steam-boats;" fish that angled for their prey, fish that were so transparent that you could see their whole internal organism; all these were common, and what wonder then that among these curious creatures should appear this hideous monster?

"Take care!" cried Merton, warningly. "He is about to attack us!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COMBAT.

It was indeed true that the serpent was about to make the attack, having discovered the enemy that had disturbed him.

He rose from the water to a great height, arched his neck, rolled his big eyes, and made a sudden dart, as quick as a lightning flash, at Van.

Chipps had armed himself with one of the guns taken from the Vampire, and he fired upon the instant, the bullet striking the creature upon the neck and glancing off as if from a steel plate.

It turned the creature's head somewhat, however, and Chipps turned it considerably more by delivering the monster a blow between the eyes with his clubbed musket.

The worthy man expended every ounce of his strength upon the blow, which shattered the stock of the musket, sending the fragments scattering in all directions and leaving the barrel in Chipps' hands.

"Well!" ejaculated the astonished fellow, as he drew back; "the critter scarcely winked at that, but anyhow, he didn't get at the boy."

Van seemed to be the creature's especial point of attack, as though he was perfectly aware that it was the boy who had first broken his rest, and recovering from his first effort, he threw himself once more upon the lad, uttering a savage roar.

This time it was Harlowe who came to the rescue, driving the boat-hook, which Van had dropped, deep into the frightful creature's body, causing the red blood to spout out in a perfect stream, and making the monster writhe with agony.

He drew back and disappeared beneath the waters, which were dyed crimson with his gore, presently coming up again, however, upon the other side of the raft.

Again he rallied to the attack, directing his energies against Van as before, seeming to have an especial antagonism to the lad.

Chipps and Harlowe rained blow after blow upon his head and neck, their weapons being clubbed muskets, and again the terrible creature retreated, diving beneath the water, from which he seemed to gain new vigor, as Antæus did from falling upon the earth.

He arose for the final attack, his eyes seeming to glitter with the deadliest rage and hate, his forked tongue darting forward and back with lightning-like rapidity, and his teeth and jaws

the troubled waters.

"Here's to end your miserable existence," hissed Merton; "the boy's life is too precious for you to take. He is perhaps destined for better things, and I shall at least give him the chance, provided he ever escapes from this place, to show the metal he is made of."

He thought rather than said this, for he had already raised a double-barreled gun to his shoulder, and, as the monster darted forward, he fired.

Crack!

Crack!

The reports rang out with startling distinctness in that silence, broken only by the hiss of the water, and the view by the dense smoke which arose, Merton having crammed both barrels full to the muzzle.

The second bullet took him on his foot, and would have done so had not Chipps caught him in his outstretched arms, as the raft rolled and tossed with the motions caused by the dying leviathan.

Both shots had told with fatal effect, for when the smoke cleared the monster was just disappearing beneath the waves, both eyes closed, blood flowing in torrents from his jaws, and his arched neck wrinkled and shriveled in huge folds.

He sank at once, and the raft glided over the spot where he had disappeared, never to rise again, for that was the last they saw of him; and glad enough they were, too, for the sight of his dead body would afford no particular consolation, now that they knew he was dead and quite beyond resurrection.

"Brayvo! Mr. Merton," said Chipps; "ye done well, catechise me if ye didn't, and you have my most heartfelt and un-

"And mine," added Harlowe. "You have acted nobly."

"What I did was for the boy's sake," growled the man, half petulantly, throwing down his smoking weapon. "I care nothing for your praises. I am as indifferent to them as to your condemnation."

"Mr. Merton, I thank you for saving my life," said Van, putting his hand into that of the man, who had rescued him from a horrible death. "That is all I feel able to say."

"And it is enough," replied the other, giving the boy's hand a strong pressure, and turning away his head to hide his emotion. "I am more satisfied with those simple words than if you had said ten times as much."

Then he released Van's hand, and, turning away, lay down in his accustomed spot up forward in the shadow of the rail, and disposed himself for a sleep, as though he had done nothing more unusual than caught a few fishes or eaten his dinner.

A week passed, during which the raft made its way slowly through the water and weed, an occasional light shower occurring, which gave the castaways an opportunity to replenish their stock of water, and you may be sure that it was not neglected.

There were no wrecks of any size to be seen, and the rubbish they did come across—broken boats, splintered spars, tops of ships' houses, planks, ribs and bits of deck timber—were all so rotten and water-soaked that no use whatever could be made of them.

Now and then they would come upon what may have been a raft, weak and fragile and falling to pieces, with perhaps an empty water cask aboard, a ragged sail hanging from a miserable mast, and fragments of old lashings fluttering in the wind, to show how some poor unfortunates like themselves had been cast upon the waves, and, more fortunate than they, perhaps, had found rest beneath them.

These were sad sights, and the party turned from them with heavy hearts, thinking that perhaps theirs would have been a happier lot had they, too, perished, instead of living to float aimlessly about in the sea of grass.

"I can't imagine how the Frenchman manages to live," said Van, one night, a week after the adventure with the sea-serpent. "There are no ships here from which he might possibly obtain supplies, and he had no provisions with him."

"He took a keg of hardtack and a hunk o' meat as big as his body," remarked Chipps, "and that would support him for a while. Perhaps he thinks he can eat diamonds."

"He is not the first fool that has sacrificed all for the love of gain," observed Merton. "Much good may his ill-gotten wealth do him. I wish him no greater harm than that he may repent of his rashness."

"Let us not speak lightly of his misfortune," said Harlowe, "for our own case may be a desperate one yet."

That night, after the others had gone to sleep, Harlowe and Chipps sat side by side in the galley, not speaking, for their tobacco had given out, when Chipps said suddenly:

"Did you guess how near you came to the truth to-night?"

"What do you mean?"

"We haven't got grub enough to last a month."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ENCOUNTER.

A month has passed, and the castaways are without food, except such as the sea can afford them, and that is little enough, the fish being scarce and hard to catch, the crabs insufficient to support four hearty persons, and the prospect of obtaining food slight enough.

There is water in abundance, so that there is not the horrible fear of thirst before them, but water will not support life indefinitely, though water alone is better than food alone, and death again stares them in the face.

While there remained an ounce of food, Van had an abundance, Harlowe eating but little that the boy might have a sufficiency, but carefully concealing until the last the fact that there was so little.

Merton, too, denied himself, drinking large quantities of water, which no one begrudged him, and submitting uncomplainingly to his lot, his manner having considerably altered for the better in the last few weeks.

But at last starvation threatened, and the prospect looked gloomy indeed, for in such a place it was only by the merest providence that they would be able to find anything to eat, the chances being small, as what vessels did float into this waste had been already abandoned, and the supplies taken off.

Day succeeded day, night followed night, and still no sign of food, the poor castaways growing daily more thin and haggard, their pale and sunken cheeks, their glittering eyes and wasted limbs telling too plainly that the gaunt hand of death was already clutching them.

The air was hot and dry, too, for they were in the very midst of the calm belt, and at a time when there was little chance of outside influences penetrating to their retreat.

Famine was now added to the list of the perils which assailed them, and it threatened to prove a more powerful foe than any they had met with.

This condition of things could not last forever and unless a change came there was but one ending—death by starvation.

For a week they were entirely without food, being kept alive by copious draughts of water, which promised to last long after they were all dead.

It is my pleasure to record a change, however, and I pass from these terrible scenes to others more agreeable to read of, the lives of these four being destined to be saved for better things.

On the eighth day after the last morsel of food had given out a breeze suddenly and unaccountably sprang up, the waters being tossed into foamy billows, and the weed rolling about and piling up in great masses.

The raft was carried through the water at a good speed, and the change in the motion and temperature of the air was decidedly beneficial to the castaways.

They seemed to imbibe new life from the salt air, and their cheeks were actually flushed with healthy color.

The sun set in a bank of clouds, and soon after dark a most refreshing rain storm fell, Chipps not neglecting to catch as much of the water as possible, even though he was dying of hunger.

Night came on, a few stars twinkled from between the clouds, and the slender crescent of the new moon could be seen through the thin masses of vapor which partly obscured it.

The hours passed, the moon set, the skies were overshadowed, a thick darkness prevailing, through which it was impossible for the eye to penetrate.

Merton, of all the little company, was awake, seated on the rail, his head resting on his hands, his eyes fixed upon the darkness, his thoughts wandering, and his lips unconsciously murmuring a prayer for relief.

The others were all asleep, nature having been merciful to them and given them at least that precious boon, for while they slept no distressing thoughts of the morrow visited them and they dreamed only of pleasant things.

Suddenly Merton raises his head, peers forth into the darkness, bends his head and listens with the most rapt attention.

Could he be dreaming, or were those actual sounds he heard coming across the dreary waste of waters with startling distinctness?

They were words which, from hearing often, he had learned to know, although they were in a foreign tongue.

What he heard was a fragment of a French chansonette, which he had often heard Gregoire singing:

"J'ai trois castelles dans la plaine,
Deviens en la chatelaine;
Je suis plus riche qu'un roi
Eh bien, ta resille."

There the song suddenly ceases, the singer being either disturbed or not caring to indulge his musical propensities any further, having been merely singing a few odd snatches.

"It is that accursed Frenchman," muttered the listener. "So we have found him again at last? This time he shall not escape me."

Then the man procured a sharp knife from the galley and stuck it in his belt, lying down in the shadow of the rail, and appearing to be fast asleep.

Slumber did not visit his eyelids for hours, however, and meanwhile the raft drifted along in the darkness, the faint swish of the waters being now the only sound that could be heard.

After a long time there came a gentle shock against the bow of the raft, which aroused Merton, but did not awaken his companions.

He raised himself upon one elbow cautiously, and raised his eyes to the level of the rail.

A dark mass obscured his vision, and he put forth one hand, at the same time raising his eyes.

He could see a dark outline, which he knew from long practice was the hull of a vessel, had not his touch assured him already that such was the case.

He listened attentively, and hearing no sound, arose to his feet and ran his hand along the planks for some distance as high as he could reach.

Then he stood upon the rail and moved his hands back and forth, presently coming across something which appeared to give him considerable satisfaction.

He had touched the fore-chains of the stray vessel, and, finding them twisted, but still in their places.

Grasping the ends of the halyards with both hands, he

little above the other, he drew himself up, first bracing the right foot and then the left against the side, and continuing to pull himself upward until he reached the planksheer.

He quickly threw one leg over the rail, and, stepping lightly upon the deck, looked around him.

A lantern was burning in the cabin, the light being distinctly seen through the open door, and adding greatly to the weirdness of the scene.

He walked up and down the deck with the lightness of a cat, and, seeing no one, descended into the cabin.

There, upon a swinging bed in the main cabin, lay extended the form of the villainous Frenchman, wrapped in a profound slumber.

"I will not kill even this viper in his sleep," muttered the man, and then he shook the sleeper roughly, and awaited his awaking.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AVENGING.

"Wake up!" cried Merton, again shaking the sleeper.

Gregoire turned, opened his eyes, rubbed them, and then half raised himself, and, as if doubting the accuracy of his vision, stared in a frightened way at the man before him.

"Mon Dieu! Has I been dreaming, then?" he muttered.

"You may have been," answered Merton, "but you are not now. Do you know me?"

"Sacre bleu! It is not M'sieur Mairtone! I am not mistaken! Zis is ze pleasaire extreme. How you do? Sapristi, I not expect you."

He arose, and then stepped out upon the floor, when Merton, drawing his knife, and holding it so that the light fell upon its glittering blade, said:

"Are you armed? You and I have an account to settle. Where are the diamonds you stole?"

"Diamants! Of what use are diamants in ze grass? I have zem not."

"Liar! Give them to me. Whether you do or not, I am going to have your life. Do you understand that, you villain?"

"We sall see," muttered the other, drawing a knife from some place of concealment in his berth. "No man sall take my life eef I do not choose to gif it. En garde, sacre animal!"

"Ha, you will fight, then?" said Merton. "I was afraid you would not," and he at once threw himself into an attitude of defense.

The Frenchman made the first advances, his eyes glittering with rage, his jaws firmly set, and every muscle nerved for action.

He made a savage lunge at Merton, which the latter parried, the two blades sending forth a shower of sparks as they clashed together.

Again the Frenchman advanced, cutting open Merton's left cheek, but receiving an ugly wound in the side to pay for it.

After a few more struggles the two clinched, Gregoire endeavoring to throw his opponent to the deck of the cabin.

Merton's knife fell from his fingers, and with a clever movement the Frenchman tripped him and both fell to the deck, Gregoire on top.

He disengaged his right hand, and, raising it aloft, aimed a savage blow at Merton's heart.

The latter suddenly wrenched his left arm free from the pressure of the Frenchman's knee, and in an instant he had seized the knife by the handle.

Suddenly twisting his adversary's arm with a force that nearly broke it, he turned the point of the knife toward the Frenchman's own body, and, throwing all his force into the effort, plunged it up to the hilt in Gregoire's heart.

The man fell back, bleeding profusely, and in an instant Merton had recovered his own knife, which lay not far away.

Then, to make sure of his work, he drove the keen blade again and again through the Frenchman's heart, and only desisted when too faint to strike another blow.

Then he searched the body, and, finding nothing of any particular value upon it, dragged it on deck, weak as he was, and hurled it overboard.

Then descending and taking down the lantern, Merton began exploring the cabin, making for the steward's pantry the first thing, as if by instinct.

There, to his great joy, he found a quantity of cooked food, some cold coffee and a tumbler half full of grog.

This he emptied at a gulp, and without waiting to set the things out upon the table, attacked the food ravenously, washing it down with the coffee.

It was very fortunate that there was not much in the pantry, for he would certainly have killed himself, a hearty meal after late fast being the worst thing he could indulge in.

He became drowsy after this, and throwing himself into the berth lately occupied by the Frenchman, was soon fast asleep, giving no thought of his comrades.

Fortunately the raft and the ship drifted along together during the night, and when Van awoke and came out he saw the black hull towering above him, and awoke his companions with a shout.

They at once discovered that Merton was missing, and supposed at once that he must be aboard the vessel, the name of which—Good Luck—they could see upon the quarter.

"It will be good luck, indeed, for us," said Harlowe, "if there are any provisions aboard. She seems to have been abandoned in good condition, her masts being nearly all standing."

"Hey, you, Merton!" cried Chipps. "Where are you?"

As he spoke the man came on deck, looked over the rail, and said:

"Like the dog I was, I forgot all about you. Here is a line; make fast and come up. I'll drop a ladder for you."

In a few moments they were all on board, and Harlowe, descending into the run, found a keg of hard-tack opened.

He was wise enough not to eat too much at first, and his first care was to see that Van had something to eat.

Upon a hasty examination, it was seen that there were plenty of provisions aboard, a large quantity of canned goods being stowed away in the hold and in the run.

Some cans of beef soup were first attacked, and Chipps, lighting a fire in the galley of the Good Luck, prepared a nutritious bowl of soup, which greatly restored the strength of the castaways.

In the cabin were found several skeletons, which Merton looked upon with superstitious dread, muttering something about not daring to stay aboard the ship.

Harlowe spoke up, however, and said, cheerily:

"There is no need of our being alarmed because there are skeletons here. They cannot hurt us. The ship is staunch and sound, there is food enough to last us for years with proper care, and we shall have a shelter over our heads when storms arise, or when the sun is too hot."

Two or three days passed, during which the four companions regained considerable strength, Harlowe having found some wine aboard, which he administered in small quantities, keeping the key of the closet in his own pocket, much to the disgust of the temperate Chipps, who would have liked to get jolly drunk.

When another week had passed Merton revealed the secret of Gregoire's death, Van having been puzzled to account for the fresh blood-stains on the deck.

A careful search revealed the belt of diamonds hidden away in the mattress upon which Gregoire had slept, and Harlowe once more took possession of them.

The raft was relieved of such things as would be of value to the party, Chipps making a secret trip one night and carrying aboard what looked like two small kegs, though, as no one saw him, I may be mistaken.

The raft was left towing astern, for it was an old friend, the party did not like to abandon it, and, besides, it might be of great use to them subsequently.

One morning, however, Van came on deck and found that they were in quite a good-sized patch of open water, looking like a lake in the midst of a meadow.

Suddenly he noticed a bit of chafed rope dangling over the rail, and, darting a sweeping glance all around, cried out, as he made an alarming discovery:

"Our raft has broken adrift, and is nowhere to be seen!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BATTLE.

It is now a year and a half since the castaways entered the grassy sea, and there seems to be no more chance of their getting out of it now than there was at first—if anything less.

The Good Luck proved to have an appropriate name from the start, for there was food in abundance, books for Van, nautical instruments for Harlowe, clothes for Merton and supplies of all kinds for Chipps, so that the loss of the raft, which had drifted away, was not so serious a one apparently as was at first thought.

The only thing they lacked was sails, and the wherewithal to make them, for they could have rigged up jury masts and made some headway, although the steering gear was badly broken, had they had any canvas to put upon them.

It was better than the raft, however, for there was shelter when it rained, and when the sun beat too fiercely, and at night they could all gather in the cabin and enjoy themselves in many ways.

Harlowe taught Van, now a young man of nineteen, many

things which were of use to him, and at the end of six months the boy was as good a navigator as his instructor.

The puzzling thing in the affair was that the ship should have been abandoned in such good condition, for there was nothing in the log to show either sickness or even bad weather, though it was evident from the shattered masts that the vessel had gone through some very heavy gales.

The castaways did not puzzle themselves much about the matter, seeing that nothing was to be learned, and they accepted the home which Providence had sent them without asking any unanswerable questions.

Their life was without incident, the same dreary monotony of sea and sky, floating weed and drifting wreckage presenting itself in turn day after day and month after month, but in spite of all this they led a happy life and never once had a quarrel.

Van used to amuse them evenings by giving recitations, there being several books of plays and poems in his collection, and as he had a good voice and graceful, manly presence, those exhibitions were a source of great delight to all, even the taciturn Merton giving his approval.

"That's all very fine," said Chipps one night, after Van had read some of jolly Jack Falstaff's drunken harangues, "but if that 'ere Mr. False Staff had let licker alone, he'd 've been twice the man he was."

"How do you make that out?" asked Harlowe, laughing.

"Well, rum is a cuss and ruins thousands; it builds jails and lunatic hospitals; it makes lawyears and judges rich; it sows misery and dissensions among the hull civilized world, and even the semi-barbarous not-to-be-mentioned heathen tribes of Africa, which they don't wear nothing, more shame to 'em, when the good missionaries send 'em ship-loads of overcoats and woollen mufflers every year, to say nothing of pocket handkerchiefs, even they will go off on a thunderin' tear once in a way and get bilin'.

"If it wasn't for rum there'd be policemen among the Hot-tentots to club the life out of 'em when they got drunk, but it's such a cuss that all the police are needed in civilized places to help take care o' rum's victims.

"I wish to opine and asserverate most distinctively that rum is a cuss and a blight, and that ten men out of every nine that commit crime does it on that account. Why, if General Napoleon hadn't taken a glass of hot whisky toddy just before the battle of Waterloo, he wouldn't have been licked!

"Just see the retribution what followed his yielding to his passion for the cup that don't inebriate but cheers. No, no, I've got that wrong; I should have said what inebriates but doesn't intoxicate.

"Look at the retribution, I say, which followed his yielding to temptation and whisky toddy. He was put onto an island, where there wasn't nothing but water all around him, just to show what he deserved for taking all licker. He oughter have mixed his drinks better, and then this condign and unmitigated punishment wouldn't 've been meted out to him.

"Look at Hannibal again: ef he hadn't taken a hot rum before crossing the Alps, the Rum'uns would ha' had no effect on him. This is all hist'ry, and the picter-books will tell you the same."

"The old man will be as drunk as an owl to-morrow mornin'," whispered Harlowe to Van, as Chipps walked out of the cabin.

The boy was about to reply, when there came a sudden sound like the booming of cannon.

"Thunder," said Merton, quietly.

"It doesn't sound like it," replied Harlowe, quickly. "More like—"

Boom!

Boom!

Crash!

"It is the sound of cannon," cried Van in great excitement; "who can have penetrated to this waste?"

Boom!

An explosion louder than all the rest sounded at this moment, and the three rushed upon deck at once to discover the meaning of the strange sound.

Chipps was already there, and pointing over the starboard bow, where the newcomers saw a bright red light, he cried:

"It's a blasted pirate ship, and they're having the fiend's n time aboard her. They're fighting like mad."

By the bright light ahead of them they could plainly see a ship under full sail, or at least with all her sails up, though the wind had nearly died out, and upon the decks could see a

The scene was a sight to be remembered. The pirate ship, a large, dark-hulled vessel, was engaged in a fierce battle with the smaller ship. The decks were covered with the bodies of the fallen, and the air was thick with smoke and the sound of cannon fire. The pirate ship's sails were tattered and its masts were splintered, but it still fought on with a desperate courage. The smaller ship, though damaged, was still afloat and its crew was fighting valiantly. The battle was a sight of horror and glory, a testament to the brutality of piracy and the courage of those who fought against it.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PIRATE.

Chipps had spoken aright when he declared that the strange vessel was a pirate, for above the glare of the fire, illumined by the pale moon, was the dreaded black flag, with its terrible skull and crossbones in glittering white upon the sable field.

The vessel was near enough for the castaways to see all that occurred upon her decks, a fierce red light upon the poop casting a glare over the whole scene as though it had been bathed in blood.

Well might one think so, for blood flowed like water, making the decks red and slimy, and running from the scuppers in a crimson flood.

High on the quarter deck stood the figure of a man who could be taken for no one else but the captain of the pirate crew himself, his tall, commanding form and majestic bearing raising him at once above the common herd, and his lordly bearing bespeaking him the leader.

His ringing voice as he urged on his adherents, there being an evident division among the forces, could be heard above all the din of battle, and wherever he struck a man was sure to fall.

The men seemed to fight like so many fiends, the main deck being covered with one struggling, surging mass of combatants, and how the men of either party were able to distinguish friend from foe in the confusion was a mystery.

Boom!

The cannon belched forth their fiery contents, scattering the bristling missiles among the combatants and mowing a bloody swathe across the decks, while above the red light burned brightly, and showed some new scene of horror every moment.

"Cut down the villains!" roared the pirate chief. "Charge them, my own, and hurl their putrid carcasses into the sea!"

To and fro, forward and back, from side to side, and from the poop to the forecandle surged the angry mass, steel clashing with steel, pistols flashing, cutlasses cutting their way through flesh and bone, pikes, capstan-bars and every other conceivable weapon flourishing about, while man after man fell dead or wounded, the contestants fighting on, heedless of the dead, and seeming to care for nothing but the total annihilation of the whole crew.

The sails caught fire from the discharge of the cannon, and as the flames rushed upward a fiery shower fell upon the decks, adding a new terror to the fearful scene.

"God grant that they do not drift too near us," murmured Harlowe, "for if our ship is burned, what hope have we for a shelter in this frightful place?"

The pirate vessel, all ablaze and quivering with the shock of the cannonading and the rush of the combatants, drifted past the Good Luck at a safe distance, while the pirate chief called out:

"Ho, there, ye mystic dwellers in this region of death! Cast a spell over my enemies and drag them down to your deadly caves to rot and be accursed!"

Harlowe said nothing, and now the red light seemed to be extinguished as a cloud of flame burst up from the hold and drove back the blood-stained creatures, though the fighting did not cease for an instant.

Suddenly the pirate captain disappeared, the flames seemed to wrap the vessel in a perfect shroud of fire, the thick, black smoke hanging like a pall over it all, and from the centre of the blazing mass a sheet of living fire shot upward to the very heavens.

Then there came a frightful report which caused the waves to leap up in angry billows, dashing the spray high in air; and when the smoke and mist cleared away, not one trace of the pirate ship remained.

"The cusses have chawed each other all up like two Kilkinny cats," said Chipps, "and I do not prevaricate when I affirm that not even the tails is left."

"There are none left to tell the tale, at all events," said Harlowe.

"I will wager a good gallon o' wine that rum was the cause on it all; and if you could arrive at the facts, I would venture to suggest that you would find that those freebooting buccaneers had been having a high old time just previous to the disturbance. I tell you, rum is a cuss. Just look at the effects."

"I am sure we ought to be greatly obliged to it if it seas of pirates," said Van, "and I should be obliged to blessing in disguise."

"Who will ever know the name of the pirate captain?" mused Harlowe. "Who will fathom the mystery? They shall forever cling to this lawless crew? The name of their name will still be a terror to honest sailors, because they will always be expected to swoon down upon the helpless merchants and of old."

"There is some commotion yonder in the water," said Merton. "Something is swimming toward us."

"A shark, most likely," said Chipps.

"No, no, it is not a shark."

"It is a man," said the lad.

"Impossible!" replied Harlowe, quickly. "No man could have lived after that explosion."

"It is a fish of some kind."

"No, it is a man, I say."

"Nonsense!"

"Hail it, Van," said Merton, quietly.

"Don't ye do it!" cried Chipps, aghast. "It may be old Davy Jones hisself!"

"Hail him, Van."

"Shall I, Mr. Harlowe?"

"If you like."

The boy proceeded to the rail, and, looking toward the round object that was floating toward them, appearing just above the water, he shouted in ringing tones:

"Ahoy, there! If you are human, speak! Whence came you?"

Hardly had the words died away before the answer came clear and distinct from the water:

"I am human, at least, whether you are or not." What vessel is that?"

"The Good Luck. Come aboard."

"Whither bound?"

"Where the Lord of the tempest wills."

"If he is a devil, that'll settle him sure," grunted Chipps, "for them fellows can't stand no such talk as that."

Far from being a spirit, however, the swimmer proved to be a man, and in a few minutes he clambered up the side and stood, all wet and dripping, upon the deck.

"You have come in good time," he said, in a voice that quivered with emotion, "for I had given myself up for lost."

Van started at the sound of the voice, and drew back, for in the stranger he at once recognized the pirate captain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NARRATIVE.

"Don't be afraid, boy," said the pirate chief; "I will not harm you; my fighting days are over."

"I am not afraid; I was merely surprised."

"At seeing me alive after that terrible explosion? Well, it is a lucky thing that I leaped overboard just before it happened. I thought that that would be the end of it."

"You are wounded," said Van, seeing clots of blood upon the man's uniform.

"Yes, but it matters not; Captain Moloch has lost blood before."

"You choose a singularly appropriate name," muttered Harlowe, "though if you had called yourself Satan or Belial it would have been better yet."

"Ha! ha! you know me, I see," replied the man, with a fierce laugh. "A merry life mine has been, and I am sorry to lose my beautiful Nemesis. That was the name of my ship."

"Have you never imagined that a Nemesis was pursuing you?" asked Merton, in grave tones. "You have changed for the worse since I last saw you, Jack Hazard."

"Who calls me by that name?" cried the pirate, starting. "Ha, Matt Merton, is it you?" he added, coming forward and looking the man in the face. "Yes, it is, indeed. What have you been doing since you and I roamed the bush together in Australia, Matt?"

"Much the same as ever, though lately I have changed. The old life has no charm for me now, and I shall end my days in this wilderness, an honest man."

"Are you two individuals acquainted, might I ask?" said Chipps.

"I should say we were," laughed Captain Moloch. "Why, we roamed the bush together, got in and out of jail together, cracked the same cribs, knocked the same men on the head, were regular pals until I took to the sea, and Matt skipped over to Africa to try his luck at robbing the diamond seekers."

"I have abandoned all that," said Merton; "pray let it be forgotten."

"Why were your men fighting?" asked Harlowe, changing the subject, seeing that Merton was pained at the revival of these bitter remembrances.

"Why?" asked the captain, shaking his dripping garments, and sitting upon the rail. "Because some of the villains mutined, that's why. I will tell you all about it."

"We were chased by a beast of a frigate, and I ran into the argasso to get rid of them, knowing that they would not follow me in such a detestable hole."

"Having once got in, the trouble was to get out, for the

winds were baffling, when there were any at all, and the weeks followed one another on the slowest kind of feet, and still we stuck.

"We passed a boat containing three skeletons, and the men looked upon it as a bad sign, and began to growl and threaten. For very deviltry I lowered a boat and brought the skeletons aboard, and set 'em on deck, just to spite the superstitious wretches."

"Who the men were I could not tell, but the name upon the stern of the boat was 'Snowflake, from——'"

"Just as I said," spoke up Chipps. "I told Skipper North that he would want the food he chucked overboard, and that a fearful death was in store for him."

"They had died of starvation, I suppose, for there was no food nor water in the boat, and the thwarts were stained with blood."

"There was the end of as big a villain as ever walked, for I haven't no doubt that his skeleton was one of 'em. He had done crimes enough to sink a ship, and even the boy, poor little Davy, would have nothing to do with him."

"You knew him?" said Moloch.

"Slightly," and Chipps winked at his companions, having already told them the history of Captain North and the loss of the Snowflake. "Him and me was old pals, and we loved each other so much that we tried to put a whole ocean between us. So old North is dead? Well, I told him he'd die a wretched death, and his poor victims are at last avenged."

"To finish my story," continued the captain, "I brought the skeletons aboard, where they remained for several days, no one daring to disturb them; but at last my second officer, more daring than the rest, hurled them into the sea."

"The men declared that I had brought them here to die, that I cast a spell upon the vessel, and until I died there would be no luck for them."

"The crew were about evenly divided for and against me, and after a few aggressive acts upon the part of the malcontents, we came to an open rupture."

"Rallying my own around me, I lit a red light, ran up my flag and charged the cut-throats, resolving to utterly exterminate the dogs."

"The fight was long and bitter, as you saw; and though we raked our foes with the cannon, they cut my men down like weeds."

"The sight of your vessel caused new terror to the superstitious villains, as they thought it was the Flying Dutchman, or some such ill-omened craft, and they fought more desperately than ever, lest they should all be carried down."

"I saw that there was no hope for us, and my first officer volunteered to go below and throw a torch into the magazine, to blow up the whole ship."

"I cared nothing for him, my own life being of more account to me than his; and when he had departed I jumped overboard, resolving to save my own life at all events."

"I sank beneath the mass of weed, and, diving deep, swam beneath the water until I reached a clear space, where I arose just as the last crash took place."

"The waters surged over me and I dived again, coming up not far from some vessel, which I struck out for, and was close at hand when you discovered me. That is all I have to tell. The Nemesis is gone and I still live, though what chance there is for excitement in this horrible place I don't know."

"My usual luck will bear me out, I suppose, and Captain Moloch will yet plow the seas once more, and, standing on his quarter deck with the black flag floating over his head, will yet carry dismay to the hearts of his enemies!"

"There's a flag what beats your dirty black rag all to bits," said the old cook, coming out of the cabin at that instant, and, unfurling the glorious stars and stripes, he waved it over the pirate's head.

Merton was visibly affected, and said with considerable feeling:

"Ah, Jack, it had been better that you had retained your allegiance to that old flag, and you might now be an honorable man and the commander of some brave frigate in your country's service."

"The rover's life for me," cried Moloch, adding gravely: "Put up the old flag, for though I have never fired upon it I cannot bear the sight of its crimson stripes and glittering stars. Fold it away, for the sight of it unmans me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ATTACK.

Jack Hazard, or Captain Moloch, as he had been called, remained aboard the Good Luck, for, although he was clearly not the best sort of companion for a man to have, Harlowe could not refuse him a shelter, and he made one of the lit

company, and did his share of the work, what little there was to do.

The instinct of lawlessness was strong within him, however, and Van often saw him look with longing eyes upon the belt of diamonds which Harlowe still carried, as if he would like to possess them.

Two or three months passed away, and by the observations which Van had taken, the ship was nearing the northwestern edge of the Sargasso, though upward of five hundred miles still intervened before they could reach the open water, and even then, without sails, they would still be at the mercy of the current.

It was night, and very dark, and Van had gone to sleep in the shadow of the starboard rail, the cabin being too close for him, when he became conscious that some one was talking near him, the words being of dangerous import.

He gradually awoke, and, hearing certain phrases which told him that mischief was afoot, lay perfectly still, scarcely daring to breathe, and listening to the conversation.

The speakers were Merton and Hazard, and unaware of his presence, on account of the darkness, had taken up a position upon the rail directly over his head, their dangling heels swinging just a few inches above him.

He dared not move for fear of attracting their attention, and the conversation was one which it was most important for him to hear, as the lives of all might depend upon the knowledge he would thus obtain.

"You are surely not afraid, Matt?" said Hazard. "It will not be the first time you have knocked your man on the head."

"It's not that, but his being a friend of mine since I have known him, and I cannot do it."

"You needn't strike the blow. I'll do that, and you can take the diamonds."

"Then we will have to leave the vessel."

"And share the fate of the Frenchman you told me of. No, the ship must be ours. We can spare the cook, for he is a harmless sort of fellow, and will do as we say."

"Don't be mistaken about him," replied Merton. "He can fight like a lion, and will stand no nonsense."

"H'm! Give him rum enough and he'll be all right. He keeps it in the galley, hidden under the seat. I've seen him go and get blind drunk after having delivered one of his long lectures. Keep him drunk, and he is perfectly safe."

"But the boy, I cannot kill him. No, no, Jack, give up this mad scheme. Of what use are the diamonds to us in this place?"

"Do you want to die here?"

"Do you want to escape?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that five men eat more than two?"

"Yes."

"Then if these three are out of our way there is more for us, is there not?"

"Yes."

"Suppose that we are rescued in six months. The food on board will last us five men about three months, rather less, if we are alone. If we two are alone we have some hope; if they are with us we have none."

"You don't know that we will be rescued in six months."

"We must drift out by that time, and once on the edge there is more chance of getting in the track of vessels than there is here."

"True."

"What is it, life or death?"

"And the diamonds?"

"They will be ours, of course."

"And we shall return rich, we who have known poverty and privation. I will purchase a small vessel, take a trusty crew and, skimming the seas, capture one to my taste, and be a rover once more."

"And die a felon's death."

"No, I will die upon the quarter-deck, with the bullets whizzing about me; my good sword in hand and the bodies of my foes at my feet."

"Give up the idea of the pirate's life when you are safe."

"Putting that aside, we must live and they must die. There is not enough for us all. Harlowe sleeps in the inner cabin with his door locked."

"Yes."

"We will attack Chipps, and the boy will give the alarm. Harlowe will come out, and then the coast is clear."

"Well?"

"You can then enter the cabin from the quarter-deck and secure the diamonds. I kill Harlowe, you wound the boy, and Chipps surrenders."

"Yes."

"Now, let us go. We are waiting for the night."

sary passengers, and stand a better chance for getting out of our troubles."

"But Harlowe is armed."

"With a knife, yes; but not with a pistol, as you and I. I have put the guns in a safe place, and you and I are the only ones aboard that are thoroughly provided for an emergency."

"You seem to be determined upon this measure?"

"Yes, for our lives depend upon our immediate action."

"When will you strike?"

"Now."

"So soon?"

"Yes, for they are all asleep. Let us take the cook first."

Now was the time for action, and Van quickly wormed himself along the deck and sprang to his feet just as the two plotters leaped down from their perch.

"Confusion!" yelled Hazard. "We are discovered. The boy has heard all. Up, and cut him down!"

"Shoot him!" cried Merton. "That is the quickest way."

Crack!

Crack!

Two pistol shots rang out upon the still air, but Van had by that time descended the stairs leading to the cabin, narrowly escaping being hit by the flying bullets.

He ran at once to Harlowe's room, and, pounding loudly upon the door, shouted lustily:

"Wake up, or there will be murder done! Wake up—wake up!"

"Curse him!" hissed Hazard. "We must stop his noise or our plans will fail."

He rushed into the cabin, but Chipps had been awakened by the pistol shots, and was just coming out of his room as Hazard entered.

He seemed to know that something was wrong, for with one blow of his brawny fist he felled Hazard to the deck, saying:

"Lie there, you immoderate cuss, and, as for you, Matt Merton, if you don't behave yourself, I'll chuck ye over to give the sharks a meal."

Merton made one bound, and, seizing Van by the throat, threw him to the deck, and was about to finish him with a blow when the door of Harlowe's cabin flew open, and the man rushed out, half dressed.

Seeing the state of affairs he sprang upon Merton, and grappled with him just as Hazard came rushing up with a pistol in his hand ready to strike him a cowardly blow from behind.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REPULSE.

Van had been thrown down, and was too weak from the choking given him by Merton to be of any present assistance to his comrades.

Harlowe was struggling desperately with the two villains, who seemed determined to kill him, both being desperate men and having the utmost at stake.

Hazard was bad from natural instincts, and would have been willing enough to engage in such an encounter without any particular reason, but Merton having once taken this step, had everything to lose if he failed.

If Harlowe succeeded, and he lived, his position among his former associates would be a most unenviable one.

They would always regard him with suspicion, even if they gave him his liberty, and he could hope for no such pleasant intercourse as he had had with them, being thenceforth isolated and alone.

It was, therefore, all or nothing with him, and he fought with the utmost desperation, and more like a wild beast than a human being.

He was on one side and Hazard on the other, the latter watching his chance to get in a blow, the contestants twisting and turning so much that he was afraid of hitting Merton if he fired.

Merton suddenly forced Harlowe up against the partition and held him there, thus giving the former pirate a chance, which he quickly sought to improve.

Chipps was on hand, however, and as the villain pulled the trigger, he struck his hand and threw it up.

Crash!

The bullet flew through the glass of the skylight, leaving Harlowe uninjured.

Whack!

Chipps struck out with his huge fist, and, taking the wretch under the ear, sprawled him upon the floor all in a bunch.

He then turned his attention to Merton, whom he disarmed in an instant, Harlowe assisting him, and before the man knew it he was pushed into one of the smaller rooms and locked.

Hazard had sprung to his feet by this time, and came

ing at Chipps with drawn knife, furious as a hungry wolf, his eyes fairly blazing and his teeth set firmly together.

Chipps seized the uplifted arm by the wrist, and the two men clenched, reeling backward and forward, both trying to get the advantage, and neither succeeding.

Suddenly, however, Hazard tripped over the lower step of the flight leading on deck, and fell, his arm doubling under him and the knife penetrating his side, cutting deep into the left lung.

He grew limp in an instant, his hand relaxing its grasp upon the knife, and the blood gushing in a perfect torrent from his mouth.

By the time Chipps had arisen and Harlowe had procured a light, the man was dead and lying in a pool of his own blood, his face still distorted with evil passions and his left hand just clutching at the knife-handle as if to draw it from the wound.

"Well, that disposes of him," remarked Chipps. "He has died by his own hand at last, and all for not being moderate. How did the thing begin, anyhow?"

Van then repeated the substance of the conversation he had heard, and the whole matter was made clear.

"We are very fortunate in escaping so well," Harlowe remarked. "I feared all along that this man would regain the influence over Merton that he once had, and induce him to commit some desperate act."

"He was a bad one from foundation to turret," observed Chipps. "See how he blowed up his ship and deserted his fellows, all to save his own blessed life. I'll venture to suggest, and I don't think I prevaricate, that if these two wretches had got hold of the ship, that this one would have managed, some time, to dispose of Merton so as to have everything his own way."

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Van.

"With Merton?"

"No, but this dead pirate."

"I will answer at once without needless circumlocution and with great moderation," replied Chipps, and shouldering the lifeless body he went upon deck.

There was a splash, and when Van and Harlowe reached their comrade's side he was standing by the rail unencumbered, looking over into the water as calmly as though watching the gambols of a school of porpoises.

"If we'd done that with him in the first place we'd 've been all right," muttered the pleased cook. "Now we can get along together more moderate, I expect, though there's that Merton, I'm afraid he'll be as much a cuss to us as rum is to the world."

"What can we do with him?" asked Harlowe.

"Don't know as we can chuck him overboard, nor can we let him free. It's as tough as the temperance question, hang me if it isn't. Reminds me of a case down in Jersey, and as the moral's a good one I'll tell it."

"There was old Deacon Hardtack, what had such a taste for rum that his butcher's and baker's bills didn't amount to nothin'. He fairly lived on rum. See the cuss of the stuff, cheatin' a man out of a honest livin'. If it hadn't been for rum, the butchers and bakers would ha' prospered, for the deacon was an awful eater previous to getting religion, which was about the time he began to drink."

"Well, leavin' the deacon aside, rum is a cuss, and, allegorically speakin', tears down more yards o' fence in a day than temperance kin put up in three. Look at your gin palaces, what elegant mirrors and counters and sideboards they has, what gorgeous chandeliers and picters and break-your-neck in the parlors."

"There's a mortgage on one side, an incubus on top, a sheriff at the back door, and two plumbers and a gasman down cellar taking away the fixtures. Where's your elegance? Gone to furnish the gin-mill, or the pawnbrokers, while the sot gracefully reclines on the floor."

"Why, if it hadn't been for rum where would Alexander the Great have been? He took a bath in a river, and was so froze to death, all because rum and water wouldn't mix; one was too hot and t'other too cold. If he hadn't been a drinkin' man he'd never have got caught that way."

"I never heard that he was," said Van, with a laugh.

"Then your early eddication has been neglected, that's all I 'ave to say, and I'm sorry to see sich ignorance. Anyhow, you thank your stars that it wasn't rum as done it!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRAITOR.

"where is your case in point?" asked Van. "Seems to be wandering from your subject."

"I'll get the bald spot on his head," said Van, "and then I'll be back."

"Well, as the story-book says, that will be continued in our next. I aren't got time to give you the hull of it now."

"Let's retire," said Harlowe, "and in the morning consult as to what had better be done."

"And Merton?"

"He is safe for the night. I hope your lecture won't have any bad effect upon you in the morning, Chipps."

"Reckon it won't," replied the other, laughing.

Then they all went below and turned into their rooms, none of them observing that the door of the small room, in which Merton had been confined, was slightly ajar.

An hour later, had one been in the lower hold, he would have seen the man working away diligently with an auger and bit-stock, evidently boring holes, though why there was any need of doing so might have puzzled them.

He worked silently and swiftly, making as little noise as possible, and after some time drew out the auger.

A jet of water followed, shooting up several feet like a fountain, and then bubbling up less noisily.

Merton quickly betook himself to another point a few feet away, and began boring again, a smile of hellish satisfaction crossing his bearded face.

The auger worked its way quickly through the wood, and before many minutes had elapsed another jet sprang up from below.

Thus the man works silently through the night, shifting his position from time to time, the water gaining upon him and driving him higher up on the side.

What devilish work is this that he is engaged in?

Scuttling the ship!

This is the way in which he recovers the ground lost by joining the pirate in his unsuccessful plot to obtain possession of the ship.

He is disgraced and will be forever an outcast—a man despised by his companions—and death were preferable to that. If he must die, why not all at the same time?

In that way he may be avenged upon them for their scorn and contempt, and for the blows they have struck him.

While the three were on deck he broke open the door by one push of his strong shoulders, and, totally unobserved, crept to the tool chest, secured what he wanted, and made his way into the hold.

Here he began his unholy work, and kept it up all the rest of the night, boring more than a dozen holes in the side of the ship, all below the water line.

Less would have sufficed, but he wished the catastrophe to take place as soon as possible, that there might be the less time for preparing for their departure.

He was still engaged in his task when Van arose, and, going into the general cabin, noticed the door of Merton's prison standing wide open, the motion of the vessel having caused it to swing out.

He darted one glance into the room, and, seeing it was empty, quickly aroused his comrades and showed them the empty room.

"He is hiding somewhere about the vessel," observed Harlowe. "Well, as long as he does not bother us we will not disturb him. I ought to have secured the door better before I went to bed."

"He may be armed and fire upon us," Van remarked.

"He has no firearms. They are all in their places."

"Suppose we have breakfast afore we worry," spoke up Chipps. "It'll be time to fret then."

Merton did not appear, and an hour or-so later, as Van was pacing the deck, he chanced to look over the rail at a point where it was broken down.

His blood seemed to freeze within him, and he nearly fell to the deck so great was his horror.

The water was within three feet of the deck!

Then he felt a trembling beneath him, and saw that the water was agitated all along the side of the ship, as though they had been rushing along under all canvas, when in reality they were only drifting slowly.

"We are sinking!" cried the boy, "and our raft has left us."

Harlowe heard the cry, and, rushing to the boy's side, asked:

"What is the matter, Van?"

"Look over the side!"

Harlowe looked, and his heart jumped into his throat.

"Heaven help us, we are lost!"

At that moment Chipps came running from the cabin, having been in the hold for something he needed, and with a face blanched from terror, he gasped:

"There's nine or ten feet of water in the hold, and it's gaining at every second!"

"Quick!" shouted Harlowe, "get the axes; we must make a raft."

"Cut away the rail!" yelled Chipps; "we must make a raft."

"How did this happen?" asked Van, getting an ax and handing it to Harlowe.

"There's been deviltry on foot, you may be sure."

"Who has done it?"

"I have!"

All three turned and beheld Merton standing before them.

"You?"

"Yes. I have scuttled the ship! We shall all die together!"

"Traitor!" hissed Harlowe, raising the ax and springing forward.

Van laid a hand upon his arm and detained him.

"Stop!" he said. "Leave him to the vengeance of Heaven!"

"As God is my judge," said Harlowe, letting his hand fall by his side, "you will die a miserable death, Merton. You have imperiled all our lives, but He that has watched over us thus far will not permit us to perish."

Merton said nothing, but, walking forward, sat on the knighthead gazing into the ocean.

Fast flew the axes, but faster yet the good ship settled into the rippling waters, and in a few minutes would disappear beneath them forever.

"For the love of God, make haste!" shrieked Harlowe, in agony. "Get a water cask, Van, and roll it into the sea. We will pick it up afterward."

The rail was cut away, and several lengths lashed together, a keg or so of hard-tack were secured, together with one of beef, and then the rude raft was pushed into the sea.

Merton still sat alone, and, smiling grimly, muttered:

"It is useless. We will all die together."

"Traitor!" hissed Harlowe, and catching Van by the hand, leaped upon the raft and pushed off, Chipps having quickly followed.

"Good-by!" laughed Merton, scornfully, "I'll meet you all at the bottom!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHIP.

The raft was barely sufficient to hold the three with even the slight amount of provisions it carried, and was without mast, sail or rudder.

It was a fragile affair, and should they encounter a storm would be quickly demolished, leaving them to perish in the waste of waters.

The ship had sunk to the deck line and was beginning to tremble like a frightened animal, Harlowe paddling vigorously with one oar that had been saved from the first raft, putting as much distance between them and the ship as the time would allow.

"Come aboard, Merton!" cried Van. "You will perish if you remain."

"I must die anyhow, and I choose to do so here," the man retorted in surly tones. "Go your ways, we will all meet before long."

"There she goes!" cried Chipps, pointing to the ship.

They could see that she was about to make the last plunge, and Chipps and Harlowe both bent upon the oar in order to get further away from the dangerous spot.

Merton had evidently changed his mind, for he suddenly arose, and, rushing out upon the broken bowsprit, dived into the sea.

Just after he had disappeared the good ship made a plunge, the weed-covered water foamed and surged, there was a great upheaval, and with a splash the hulk which had been their home for many happy months sank from their sight.

The little raft was tossed up and down upon the heaving sea. The night was not so dark, and after a while the three could see the stars and the moon. They were all very tired, and the night was very long.

"Look!" cried Van, suddenly; "he has escaped!"

They looked, and saw Merton clinging to a broken spar or some other bit of drift, and as he saw them he shouted:

"We'll meet again, never fear, but it'll be at the bottom!"

"Better be more moderate," shouted back Chipps. "There's a better punishment ahead for you, and you'll get it just as sure as preaching."

There were many bits of wreckage around them, and Harlowe made fast one or two floating spars, which he lashed to the raft to strengthen it and give them more room to stir about.

They now felt their loss of the raft, for if they had had that they would have been very comfortable, and could have employed the time lost in making another, by getting aboard more supplies.

The outlook was more gloomy than ever, and it was not surprising that they remained silent, not daring to trust themselves to speak, lest they should utter the sad thoughts which mastered them.

They could see Merton at some little distance, and observed that he made several additions to his float, which made it more comfortable, though how he would make out for water and supplies they could not guess.

Harlowe picked up one cask in addition to that rolled over by Van, and these made a part of the raft, the bung-holes being kept uppermost, and the salt water being kept out by means of thick plugs made of cloth.

There was a tin dipper made to fit the bung-hole, and out of this they drank, taking care not to lose it, as they could not very well roll the casks over when they wanted to drink.

The day passed, and they lost sight of Merton, a thick fog arising in the night which lasted for days, and prevented them from seeing further than a few rods around them.

A week crept by, and they had added considerably to their raft, the axes doing good service, and now they had room enough, and to spare, having the water casks on deck, and a shelter built over them, under which Van could sleep, Harlowe and Chipps occupying it occasionally.

They caught many fish and found plenty to eat in the weed, and other rubbish that drifted about; and although the food was rather salt and had to be eaten raw it was better than nothing, and helped to make the other supplies last longer, the water being kept up by occasional rains and the dews which fell at night.

For six long months they floated on in this wretched state, picking up an occasional bit of drift, which served to strengthen their raft, once meeting with a spar round which was tightly wrapped a piece of canvas of considerable size, and now and again coming upon a floating plank, washed from some lumberman's deck and carried hence.

Once, to Van's surprise, they saw a tree, evidently from the tropics, and around its trunk was coiled a huge serpent, still living, although evidently nearly famished.

Van had read how the ocean currents carried strange things upon the shores they washed, and he was by no means surprised at meeting this creature so far from home. Indeed, he had long since ceased to wonder at the strange things he saw in this ocean desert, which, as any sailor who has penetrated at all into the Sargasso can tell you, is the most miscellaneous collection of rubbish that ever was seen.

One day they came upon a large turtle, which they killed and ate. Harlowe cut his head on with one blow, and they lived on turtle until they were sick of it. They were obliged to throw much of the meat away, Chipps being particularly sick of it. Their size being something remarkable, their shells were very large.

They lived on turtle until they were sick of it. They were obliged to throw much of the meat away, Chipps being particularly sick of it. Their size being something remarkable, their shells were very large.

would live so long, but there they were still, and better yet, they seemed to be approaching the outer limit, the weed being thinner and more scattered, and the open patches more numerous.

One evening Harlowe sees a sail, but it is too far off, and he does not tell his companions, for fear of exciting them unnecessarily.

The next morning Van is awake before any one, and suddenly astonishes himself and them by fairly shrieking:

"A sail! A sail!"

As they spring up he cries again:

"A ship! a ship! and almost upon us!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RESCUE.

Van had not been mistaken.

There was a ship in sight, and close at hand.

Indeed, it was almost upon them, and had not Van shouted the men on board would not have seen the raft.

It was fortunate that Van had awakened when he did.

Otherwise what now proved their salvation would have been their destruction.

"Hurrah!" cried Chipps, forgetting entirely his principles of moderation, and capering like a monkey. "We're out of this grassy sea at last."

Not so fast, Chipps, old fellow! You have a long time to serve yet before you are out.

"Ahoy, there!" called Harlowe to a man standing forward; "pitch us a line."

Chipps made it fast, and in a moment the raft grated against the side of the ship, and Harlowe, seizing the after chains, drew himself up, lifting Van after him, the cook following.

Ready hands from above assisted them, and in a few minutes they stood on deck before the astonished sailors.

"Welcome heartily, mates," said a bronzed and weather-tan tar, advancing. "You've had a lucky escape. Wrecked,

"Yes."

"What wreck?"

"I'm from the Snowflake, old Captain North," said Chipps.

"And we are from the steamer Adriatic, bound from Cape Town to England," said Harlowe, indicating himself.

"What?" cried the first mate, coming forward. "Did you say the Adriatic?"

"Why, she was lost more than two years ago. At least nothing has been heard of her since that time."

"Nor of any of her passengers or crew?"

"No," said Harlowe. "She was up by an infernal machine."

"Where have you been for these two years and a half?"

"In the grassy sea."

"An old sea-horse as ever trod a quarter-deck."

"I have heard of the vessel," said the captain, "but it is nearly three years since she was last heard of. In fact, I sought her myself and spoke her."

"Did you command the Carrier Dove at that time?"

"Yes."

"I have heard of you," said the captain, "but I have not seen you since. You were wrecked on the Adriatic, and I have been looking for you ever since."

Chipps then briefly related his adventures, the meeting with his comrades and the events of the two years during which they had been adrift in the sea of grass.

The tale was an astonishing one, but as they all told the same story with the difference natural to the methods of each, the captain could not but believe it.

He had entered the Sargasso the day before, but did not intend to remain in it long, as the weed impeded the progress of his vessel.

He was bound to the Cape of Good Hope from Canada, and had two or three passengers in the cabin, friends of the owners, though one, a young lady, was going to rejoin her father, whom she had not seen for several years, and had taken this mode of travel as costing less than by steamer.

The name of the ship which had picked up the three castaways was the Harold, named after the son of the captain, James M. Lawton, who was a part owner.

The first mate had formerly been in the employ of the steamship company to which the Adriatic had belonged, and he was well acquainted with all the steamers of the line, and remembered very well that the lost vessel had taken a new first officer almost at the very moment of starting.

Harlowe spoke privately to the mate, Mr. Edmunds, concerning the loss of the Adriatic, and of the infernal machine, the latter promising to say nothing until they reached port.

"Have you this letter written to old Cheatham?" he asked.

"No, Merton kept it, and he was lost. I know its contents well, however, as they interested Van, the boy with us, very nearly. It was his uncle who conspired to blow up the vessel. Cheatham was but his tool."

"You say that the clock was made by one Goldschmidt?"

"Yes, a resident of Cape Town. It is not the first he has made for the same purpose, if report speaks aright."

"Say nothing of this while you are aboard the Harold. You will understand the reason later."

The castaways were well cared for, and were the centres of interested circles, each having his own set of admirers.

Chipps was popular among the seamen, Harlowe among the officers, and Van a great favorite with the passengers, particularly the ladies, the young girl who was going home to her father being noticeably attracted to him.

"They call you Van," she said. "That is not your whole name. What is the rest of it?"

"Van Brunt."

"You will let me talk with you often, Mr. Pierce?"

"Certainly, if you will call me Van."

"Short for Van Brunt?" she asked. "Van Brunt Pierce—that is an odd name. It is both Dutch and English. Mine is all German, every bit of it."

"Let me hear it."

"Lena Goldschmidt, daughter of Sigmund Goldschmidt, of Cape Town."

"Is he a clockmaker?" said Van, excitedly.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"I have heard of him," he answered; and then added, mentally:

"The daughter of the man by whose devilish agency we were nearly all destroyed! There is a strange fatality in this. I had better not correct the error she has made in regard to my name."

When Van told Harlowe of the circumstance, the latter said:

"Ah, now I understand why Edmunds advised me to say nothing about the real cause of the loss of the Adriatic. I wonder if this girl knows of the reputation her admired father bears?"

"She cannot," answered Van. "She seems too pure to be the daughter of such a fiend."

"I see that you are interested in her, Van."

"Yes, and I would not have her know this for worlds."

The officer of the watch, it then being night, passed at the

"It looks blustering, Harlowe. We are likely to have a bad night."

"Yes."

It was well that neither of them knew how bad it was destined to be in more senses than one.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HURRICANE.

It was indeed a wild night, wilder than any of them had imagined, for the Harold had been destined to meet with a strange experience, and this was but the beginning.

When the middle watch was called at midnight the wind began to blow quite smartly, mingled with squalls of rain, the men putting on their oilskin jackets to keep off the water.

Two bells sounded, and the wind increased, accompanied by heavy rain and distant thunder and lightning, the waves rising to a greater height and the wind shifting rapidly from one quarter to another.

Four bells came, and the wheel was relieved, but in about ten minutes the helmsman called for assistance, as he was not able to manage the wheel alone.

When the man who went to his aid had got half way, the wind suddenly veered right around, the sails taken all aback, and the gale suddenly springing up in full fury, threw the vessel upon her beam ends in an instant.

"Call all hands!" shouted Captain Denton.

"All hands ahoy!" yelled one of the seamen in at the fore-castle door.

The men rushed on in great confusion, the ship was rolling so fast that it was impossible to get on deck, and the men were blown off their feet and lay stunned and motionless.

The wind increased to such a degree that the vessel was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

The captain ordered two men to take the wheel, but in the quarter-deck they were both taken off their feet and lay against the lee rail where they lay stunned and motionless.

In the instant the ship was struck by lightning and rolled from top to bottom, one portion falling across the mainmast, so that the ship lay helpless in an instant.

While she rolled, utterly at the mercy of the elements, in the middle of the sea, the jibboom was carried away, the head-castle top torn off, and the fore-castle top torn off, and several of the seamen who had gone aloft for that purpose being carried away—were also blown into ribbons, the fore-castle top torn off, and the fore-castle top torn off, and the fore-castle top torn off.

It happened in an instant almost, and to make matters worse the gale increased to such a degree that the vessel was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

The fore-castle top was carried overboard or killed by the lightning, the cook was struck dead by the lightning, the carpenter killed by falling splinters, and only one of the crew remaining alive.

The ship was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

The ship was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

Morning came at last, and the wind still blew with considerable force, dashing the spray upon the deck, and making the position of the survivors a most unenviable one.

The poor boy buried his face in his hands and gave way to his bitter grief and disappointment, unchecked until Chippie came along and said, quietly:

"Take it mod'rate, Van—take it mod'rate. There are extra spars and sails and we'll get home under a jury, never fear. It ain't so bad as it looks."

"Is that so, Harlowe?" cried Van, looking up.

"Yes, my lad; we are not necessarily obliged to do anything, and, when the wind subsides somewhat, we can do toward making our escape."

By noon the gale had so far moderated that the male survivors, four in number, in addition to our friends, were to rig a jury-mast forward, spreading a tolerably large upon it, which, with a sort of makeshift jib, enabled them to get on their feet, and the wind shifted rapidly from one quarter to another.

The wind increased to such a degree that the vessel was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

With a fair wind, therefore, and with high hopes for the future, they turned their ship toward the open sea in full confidence of soon leaving the Sargasso far behind, little knowing that for some of them it was destined to be a grave.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BURIAL.

Another year has passed, and the Harold floats idly in the weed-covered waters of the grassy sea, her sides covered with green fungus, her decks bleached white by the rays of the sun, her masts and cordage all gone, her rudder fallen away and all the gallant array that once trod her deck, a dozen alone remain.

The story of their bitter disappointment is soon told, the subject is too painful for me to linger long upon.

The survivors were all dead, and the ship was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

Three of the survivors of the Harold's crew lost their lives, the sole remaining one being a seaman by the name of Van, the passengers having died, some at the time of the storm, others from broken hearts, after having drifted for months, with the exception of Lena Goldschmidt and a woman who was accompanying her to meet her father.

Van had had no opportunity to reveal his true name, fearing that the young girl might some day discover the wretch her father was, did not care to have his name cause her any regrets.

He was deeply interested in the girl now, and feared that she ever discovered that he had been one of the passengers of the ill-fated Adriatic she might repulse him, from a sense of unworthiness on her part. He never spoke of his name, and she never knew that he was Van, the seaman who had been blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

The ship was blown under water, the house on deck was swept away, the fore-castle top torn off, the cabin unroofed and the mainmast literally torn out, and the wreck upon the water.

deception, glad to escape relating any reminiscences of the poor child, toward whom his old heart had warmed in their common desolation.

It was singular that an event—it might almost be called a fatality—should have happened to them a few months after they had again been wafted back into this weary waste, and as it makes an important link in my story, I shall give it as it occurred.

They were drifting along one day, moving at the rate of two or three miles an hour, when Van, who was on deck, called Harlowe's attention to some object which was floating not far from them.

Chipp's came on deck, and when the fragment of wreck, with its ghastly burden, drifted nearer he and Van drew it alongside.

"My words have come true," he said. "Merton has died of starvation, lashing himself to this mast to keep from drowning. How curious that we should come across him!"

"It is fate," said Van, gravely.

Harlowe drew one skeleton hand from its place of concealment, and there, clutched tightly in the bony fingers, was a small packet wrapped in oiled silk, the nature of which Van could very readily imagine.

Van himself disengaged it, and, retiring to a quiet part of the vessel, examined the packet, finding it to contain the letter written by his uncle to Cheatham, besides other memoranda which Merton had made respecting the rogue of an agent, Goldschmidt, and Jack Hazard, the pirate.

These were all valuable, and Van, carefully restoring them to their wrapper, put the whole into his pocket and returned to the side of the vessel where he had left Harlowe and Chipp's.

"The packet contains what I supposed it did," he said, quietly. "What shall you do with these bones?"

"You'll find a shot in the galley," said Chipp's, the cook having built himself a new one to take the place of that which had been swept away. "Fetch it here, and some of the sail cloth. It's been used pretty freely for shrouds since we've been here."

By the time Van returned, the skeleton had been brought up on deck in good order, and Chipp's at once proceeded to sew it up in canvas, placing the weight at the feet.

At the word the body was slid quickly into the water; it disappearing, there were a few bubbles, and then the waves closed forever over the spot which marked the last resting-place of poor Matthew Merton.

He had received Christian burial, which was more than he had dared hope for, and his comrades had forgiven him and interceded for him with the Most High for entire pardon; and let us be assured that they did not do so in vain.

The matter had been conducted quietly, and no one on board, except those directly interested, knew what had happened, though Lena, as she watched the sea in the moonlight with Van that night, asked him why he was so unusually grave.

"I was thinking," said he, "how many more years of my life were to be spent in this wilderness."

"It is three years now since you came here?"

"Yes, and more than that, nearer four. I am nearly twenty-one, and I was but seventeen when I first came."

"And you long to reach your home again?"

"You cannot tell how much!"

"But you have no ties?"

"I have the love of country, which is the strongest tie that can bind any one."

"Could you not stay here always?"

"I might, under certain circumstances. I am more resigned

than I was at first."

"You hope for a better?"

"Yes; do you not?"

"Your hope inspires me with the same feeling."

"I am glad of that."

"Why not?"

"Because it is pleasant to find a kindred soul even in this desolate spot, and with one I love the time I spend here does not seem so irksome."

"You are greatly attached to your companions?"

"I have a still greater attachment than that I have for them even."

Lena blushed and Van continued:

"You can guess who I mean?"

"Yes," she answered, simply.

"You are not displeased?"

"I am pleased."

"May I ask you a question?"

"As many as you choose."

"Suppose you should find me different from what you had thought me—suppose my life were connected with yours in an unpleasant manner—suppose you should discover that those you loved had deeply injured me—would your shame part me from you?"

"You have said you loved me?"

"I swear it."

"You believe the passion has been returned?"

"I have hoped so."

"You have not hoped in vain. Whatever those I love have done to injure you, I shall remain true, and nothing shall part us, not even death."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORY.

Van folded the lovely girl to his heart and held her there for some moments, when he said:

"May I tell you a story of a friend of mine? The case is similar to my own, and will help you to a better understanding of it, and may make you change your decision."

"Nothing can change it," she replied, trustfully.

"But may I tell it?"

"Yes."

"There was a man, then, a villain, as I believe him, who, with others, conspired to blow up a vessel on which my friend had taken passage. This friend was heir to a large estate, which his uncle wished to retain to himself, and therefore hired a man to blow up the ship.

"This villain procured an ingenious contrivance from the first man I mentioned, which was hidden away in a ball of wool, together with a large quantity of explosive material.

"At a certain time this contrivance, which went by clock-work, exploded the hidden mine and blew up the ship. My friend was saved through divine interference, and then, by an accident, he learned of the plot against him by which many innocent lives had been sacrificed.

"This villain, the one who had furnished the engine of destruction, had a daughter who was, as I believe, totally ignorant of the hideous depravity of her father, and it was my friend's fate to meet and fall in love with her, his passion being returned.

"We will suppose that this innocent girl discovers the villainy of her father, and also how near her lover came to his death by the former's agency. Knowing this she was horrified, and, fearing that her lover would lay her father's sin upon her shoulders, resigned her love."

"But he, your friend, what did he do? Did he blame her for another's sin?"

"No, he pitied her, and his love grew stronger than ever."

"Did she know this?"

"She knows it now. What should she have done?"

"Cleaved to him in spite of father and kindred, left all to follow the man she loved. This is not a fable you tell me. Some one I love has injured you, and you fear that I will

leave you from shame. Believe me, though I dare not guess what has happened, yours I am, and yours I will remain."

"It is enough," said Van. "I need tell you no more. I will not wound your young heart by shaking your confidence in one whom you love. I forgive him his misdeeds, and trust that he may be pardoned, as far as I am concerned; but as for his many innocent victims, I can say nothing."

"Tell me, is it my father who destroyed the Adriatic? You were, then, a passenger upon that ill-fated ship?"

"I wish to say no more."

Lena turned away to hide her emotions; but presently, growing calmer, she said:

"I know you did not mean to hurt me. I must have learned all these horrible truths some day, and it was kind of you to spare me the rude shock of hearing them from strangers and enemies. I love you none the less for it, and, come what may, shall be yours forever!"

* * * * *

Five years in the grassy sea!

Van is a stalwart, bearded young fellow of twenty-two. Harlowe has begun to turn gray, and the bald spot upon the head of old Chipps has greatly increased in size; his limbs, too, showing the approach of age, and his voice having a decided crack in it.

Lena has grown into a noble woman in the last year, and is more beautiful than ever, her fair cheeks, bronzed by the sun, detracting none from her beauty, as she is the very picture of health, and is as lithe and active as a deer.

Cleet has died, and that, too, when rescue is close at hand.

The Harold's supplies have not been exhausted, though there is little left, and the vessel itself is very much the worse for wear.

They are all seated upon the deck in the early evening, Chipps holding forth as usual, having been set upon his favorite talk by some remark of Van's.

The mystery of the old fellow's libations has long since been cleared up, but they do not occur very often, and as he is never quarrelsome or disagreeable while under the influence of the "cuss," nobody minds his occasional slips, though Harlowe, for sport, sometimes locks up the cupboard where the liquor is kept, after Chipps has begun one of his lectures.

"It's all very well to talk about wine being good for your stummick," he says, "but rum is a cuss, and I kin prove it."

"Rum makes countless thousands mourn, as the geography says. Rum paralyzes the brain and exhausts the nervous energies, it vitiates the taste, destroys the palet and assifiates the heart. It builds railroads, school-houses and churches. No, I don't mean that; it tears 'em down."

"Look at Horace Walpole, the great English statesman. What did he say? That every man had the price of a glass of rum in his clothes, and that if they didn't stop drinking, the hull nation would go to ruination. And he was quite right."

"Listen to the words of Christopher Columbus, the discover of the biggest nation on earth. What did he say? That he didn't care who got the money for the circus licenses so long as he had the liquor privileges! He knew what the besettin' sins of the nation were, and he took advantage of his information and got into prison for it."

"What happened to the pilot of the Jersey Mosquito when goin' through the Hudson Highlands? He got drunk, beastly drunk, and the steamer was going to destruction, when the engineer, who could drink like a fish, and knew more than the pilot, who couldn't hold his liquor, took the wheel. If the pilot had not been so drunk, he would have run down two or three more boats, and a canal boat, for he was no more fit to be a pilot than the King of the Cannibal Islands."

"What happened to the pilot of the Jersey Mosquito? Soaked drunk, and the steamer was going to destruction, when the engineer, who could drink like a fish, and knew more than the pilot, who couldn't hold his liquor, took the wheel. If the pilot had not been so drunk, he would have run down two or three more boats, and a canal boat, for he was no more fit to be a pilot than the King of the Cannibal Islands."

"For instance, there was the great Peter, the seizer of all the Russians, and everything else he could lay hands on; he——"

What he might have disclosed concerning the autocrat of all the Russians was never known, for Harlowe, chancing to turn his eyes seaward, suddenly sprang up and cried aloud:

"Saved at last, thank Heaven!"

There was a ship in sight and the castaways had no difficulty in signaling her, the man on the lookout having already discovered the floating hulk, though he did not suppose that there were any human beings on board.

A boat was quickly lowered, and the voyagers were transferred to the Nautilus, their long sojourn in the grassy sea being ended at last, though there were still adventures in store for some of them which would prove no less perilous than those already met.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE AGENT.

In the dingiest building in a dingy street in the busy city of New York, at the very top, under the eaves and in the rear, its one window looking out upon a dark court, where numerous tall buildings have sprung up all around it, is a dirty little office, where a dirty little man sits poring over some dirty books, the chair he sits in being old and dilapidated, the table littered with papers and stained with ink, and the whole atmosphere of the place indicative of dry-rot and decay.

On a small, rusty, dirty, bent and crumbling tin sign, nailed to the outer door is painted the legend:

DARIUS CHEATHAM,
Agent, Collector and Attorney.

Above this sign is a dirty card, upon which is written in a crabbed hand:

"RENTS COLLECTED, ACCOUNTS SETTLED, MISSING HEIRS FOUND.
TERMS REASONABLE."

The man seated before the rubbish-littered table is an old acquaintance, Darius Cheatham, whom we have not seen since he lost that important letter on the wharf at Cape Town.

More than five years have passed since then, but the man has grown more than five years older, and seems all but ready to drop into the grave.

He is, in fact, this withered old wretch, but nobody would know it, and he is considered a miserable old wretch by the office boys in the building. He keeps none himself, and it is a favorite expression with them that he is only keeping alive to save the expense of a funeral.

Nobody knows where he lives, and evidently nobody cares to find out, for he has but few callers, and they seem to be about as disreputable as himself.

There are one or two exceptions to this, however, and upon this particular afternoon he has a caller, a tall, fine-looking man, somewhat gray, but quite robust and hearty in appearance.

Despite the air of respectability about him there is a look which betrays a certain amount of the character which would be likely to lead him to be trusted or credited much to be true.

He gives a short, quick rap on the door, which he repeats three or four times, and opens it with a crash.

"All right, is it?" he says in a cracked voice, "come in, and don't let any one see you, for I'm out to live."

He draws the door nearly shut, and with a look of surprise, he looks at the man, who points to a second chair. There are only two in the room, and, sitting down, he looks at the visitor, and says:

"Well?"

"It is not well," says the other, simply, "it is not well at all. Have you read the report?"

"Never do; costs too much. I get all the information I want outside of them."

"You would have done well to have read them to-day."

The other took a newspaper from his pocket, unfolded it, and, after glancing over it, read as follows:

"FIVE YEARS ADRIFT."

"A remarkable story of peril and adventure upon the sea has just come to us, the full particulars of which we shall soon be able to place before our readers. It will, perhaps, be remembered that the steamer Adriatic, plying between Cape Town and London, mysteriously disappeared some five years ago, nothing having ever been heard of her since that time.

"Two men have now arrived in this port from Bermuda who were upon the lost steamer, one in the capacity of first officer, the other as a passenger, and who, since the wreck, have been adrift upon the ocean for five years, never having seen land from the time of the going down of the Adriatic until their arrival in Bermuda.

"Incredible as it may seem, these two, with a companion, who died about a year ago, and a shipwrecked sailor whom they met on the raft in mid-ocean, have for five years been drifting about in the grassy sea of the Atlantic, subsisting upon fish and the supplies found in derelict vessels which had drifted into that strange place.

"It is intimated that their coming will throw considerable light upon the fate of the Adriatic, and that their story will incriminate certain parties, if still living, the steamer having been destroyed by an infernal machine made by a German clockmaker in Cape Town.

"The story told by the survivors is a very interesting one, we understand, and as soon as possible we shall publish it entire, knowing that it will greatly repay perusal. It is so unusually startling, however, that we wish to have the facts verified somewhat before giving them to the world, so as not to injure our reputation for veracity."

There was more than this, but that was the substance, and when the reading was finished the man laid down the paper and said:

"What do you think of that?"

"A lie. The newspapers nowadays are full of such rubbish."

"I am afraid this will prove to be a reality."

"Well, if it does, you don't know that your nephew is one of the survivors."

"Do you know who was the first officer of the Adriatic on her last voyage? Of course you do."

"Well, suppose I do. He knows nothing. I am only an agent, and if I ship an infernal machine unknown to me, who can blame me? I am only an agent."

"And the diamonds?"

"Only shipped by me as agent for some one else."

"You got the insurance."

"Only as an agent. If the principal cannot be found now, it is not my fault. I was only the agent, I tell you."

"And a mighty destructive agent, worse than nitro-glycerine, in fact. You will have to act in that capacity again, I fear."

"What for?"

"To keep my nephew from making trouble."

"But you don't know that he is alive, John Van Clief."

"I am so sure of it, Darius Cheatham, that I have come to you for advice. Read this."

He handed Cheatham another paper, which contained a long detailed account of the wreck, one paragraph of which was marked, and read as follows:

"The men, Harry Harlowe, and the boy, Pierce Van Clief, were upon the steamer Adriatic, which they claim was destroyed by human agency, and it is their intention to bring

the matter before the police of this country at once, having already advised the British authorities. Their comrade, Chipps, has much to say of the loss of the Snowflake, and it is believed that the young lady who accompanies them is a relative of the rascally clockmaker who furnished the engine of death."

"That is more serious than I thought," said Cheatham. "Well, John Van Clief, what do you propose to do?"

"That is what I want you to tell me."

"Do nothing. You are not attacking. The young man will have to prove his identity, and that is not always easy. There might be a dozen Pierce Van Cliefs. How do we know that he is the right one? Your brother may be dead; and if so, it will be hard for this boy to prove that he is what he says he is."

"Then it is five years since he has been heard of. It will not be an easy matter to dispossess me. I was to have all in case of his death."

"If he died suddenly, after having proved his claim, it would be suspicious, would it not?"

"By Heaven, he shall not prove it! I must get rid of him at once. You will help me?"

"As an agent," croaked the old villain.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COMMITMENT.

At that moment there came a tap upon the door, and Cheatham unlocked it and looked cautiously out into the dingy hall.

The door was suddenly thrown wide open, the agent being hurled into the middle of the room, and then two men entered.

"Ah, I have found you, have I?" said one, who was Harlowe himself, returned from sea.

"Uncle Jack, don't you know me?" cried the second, who was the same Van we have known so long, older than when he embarked upon his eventful voyage, and as handsome a young fellow as one would like to see.

"You are laboring under some misapprehension, evidently," said Van Clief, in icy tones. "I am not acquainted with you."

"You might not recognize me, of course, after so long an absence," said Van. "I am your nephew, Pierce."

"That makes the second," said Cheatham, suddenly. "We'll be having a dozen nephews for you to acknowledge pretty soon—eh, Van Clief?"

"What do you mean by that, you old thief?" asked Harlowe. "You thought to get rid of us by your devilish contrivances, didn't you?"

"Are you speaking to me? I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"I am Harry Harlowe, first officer of the steamer Adriatic. You know me well enough."

"I did know a Harry Harlowe once, but you are not the person. He died five years ago in an English prison-yard. They hanged him for murder."

"Which will be your fate, and that of your friend Sigmund Goldschmidt. Have you invested in any more diamonds lately?"

"If you have any business with this gentleman, you will have to take another time for it," said Van Clief, "for at present I am engaged with him."

"John Van Clief," said Harlowe, "this is the son of your dead brother, your nephew Van."

"He is an impostor. My nephew returned from Cape Town very nearly five years ago, and at present is living with me. This young man has taken advantage of a wild newspaper story to impose upon me."

"Poor boy, he is clearly insane!" interposed Cheatham. "You had better take him to an asylum, Mr.—" "I forgot your name."

"He is no more insane than I am."

"I'm sure that you are sane, for you call yourself by the name of a man that has been dead these five years."

"I tell you that he is Pierce Van Clief, and if you do not acknowledge him, there will be a means to make you. I know your plot, John Van Clief, and have the proof of it."

"Have you quite finished?"

"No. Did you ever see this letter?"

"I never wrote that letter in my life!" gasped Van Clief. "It is a forgery. You cannot blackmail me. I will have you arrested for trying to obtain money on false pretenses."

"We do not want money; we want justice. Since you deny it, we will go to the bottom of the Adriatic and find out the truth. The vessel was never lost, and this yarn is but the invention of some enterprising newspaper."

"That is an old story, my man. The thing has been all settled long ago as being nothing but a hoax. The captain of the Adriatic has made his deposition. The vessel was never lost, and this yarn is but the invention of some enterprising newspaper."

"I will not argue the subject. My nephew is now with me, and his identity has already been proved beyond disputing by an adventurer like yourself."

"You must have been put in an insane asylum. My friend here can have you committed if this comrade of yours will get a doctor's certificate."

At this Cheatham suddenly dived out of the room as a young lady entered it.

"Ah, Mr. Pierce, and you, Mr. Harlowe! I am glad I have found you," she said. "Chipps said you had come here."

"So—so; this is Mr. Pierce, is it?" said Van Clief. "Who did you say this young man was, madam?"

"Mr. Pierce—Van Brunt Pierce."

"Ah!"

"No, no," said Van, hastily. "I am Pierce Van Clief. It was a mistake, your calling me Van Brunt, and one that I should have corrected."

"How long have you known this person?" asked Van Clief.

"Two years."

"And he has always been called Van Brunt Pierce?"

"Yes, but mostly Van."

"Oh, Lena," cried Van, in agony, "you will ruin me. This is my uncle, who plotted to destroy the vessel that my father and I were returning in. It was blown up by——"

At this moment Cheatham returned, accompanied by two policemen and a pompous-looking man in black.

"You mustn't create a disturbance, you know," said the latter. "Ah, Van Clief, how do you do? Happy to see you. Where is the young man who persists in declaring himself to be your nephew?"

"I am Pierce Van Clief, and I denounce this man. He is a villain, and has conspired to take innocent lives that he might succeed in his nefarious plots. It is he who conspired to blow up the Adriatic."

"A moment ago," said the man in black, "I saw the policemen entering and standing in front of the door. I know the nephew of Mr. Van Clief, and know him to be a worthy young man. I have no hesitation whatever in giving a certificate of insanity."

"You must have been put in an insane asylum. My friend here can have you committed if this comrade of yours will get a doctor's certificate."

"That is an old story, my man. The thing has been all settled long ago as being nothing but a hoax. The captain of the Adriatic has made his deposition. The vessel was never lost, and this yarn is but the invention of some enterprising newspaper."

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officers dragged him away, and clapped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists.

"Away with him!" cried Cheatham. "Oh, he is as crazy as a loon. Lock him up, and put a strait-jacket on him!"

Poor Lena had fainted when she realized what she had done, but Harlowe attempted to rescue Van from the officers.

The doctor on one side and Van Clief on the other, held him back until the officers had departed, Harlowe struggling madly to escape the while.

The doctor suddenly let go one hand, and darting it into his pocket drew forth a vial and a handkerchief, which he pressed tightly and held to Harlowe's nose.

The doctor suddenly let go one hand, and darting it into his pocket drew forth a vial and a handkerchief, which he pressed tightly and held to Harlowe's nose.

One strong whiff of the pungent drug and Harlowe gasped, fell to his knees and let his head drop upon his breast.

The doctor carried Lena below, leaving her at the door, as she began to revive and look about her in a dazed manner.

Meantime Van Clief had secured the tell-tale document, and, as the doctor returned, Cheatham said suggestively:

"If you find a bottle of Dr. Harlowe's medicine in his pocket, leave him in the gutter, and when he awakes he'll tell you the truth about the vessel and the fate of the crew."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DISCOVERY.

Chipps had been left in the hotel where Van and Harlowe had gone when they arrived in New York, to await their return, but, feeling lonesome, took a stroll, intending to return at the same time they did.

The belt of diamonds had been put in the hotel safe, Van had sold one or two of the smaller stones in order to provide for the immediate needs of himself and companions, so Chipps did not feel at all concerned about them.

Lena Goldschmidt and the old woman had gone to the house of a friend of the latter, and the cook met the young girl soon after she had left the hotel.

Upon her inquiring for Van he told her where he had gone, the party having discovered Cheatham's office address in the directory, and she at once set out for the place, while Chipps continued his walk.

Perhaps it was the heat, or perhaps the principles of moderation, which presently led him to enter a well-appointed bar-room and call for a cooling drink, but at any rate he did so, and, while indulging himself saw a party of gentlemen, evidently old sailors, sitting around a table drinking and telling stories.

"I don't think the thing is improbable at all," said one of the group. "It was pretty tough, I know, but I've met with adventures that you would scarcely credit. When I was in the Good Luck——"

The man turned the old woman's attention in a moment, and, stepping up to the party, he said:

"I don't think the thing is improbable at all," said one of the group. "It was pretty tough, I know, but I've met with adventures that you would scarcely credit. When I was in the Good Luck——"

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"Well, the fact of the matter is," said the man, "the ship was abandoned in the open sea, and the crew were all drowned after putting in all her supplies."

"Abandoned in the open sea?"

"No, but in part. I was certain, and the men were all"

"Then we've got work to do," said Chipps. "Stay here and I'll fix the whole thing up."

THE END OF THE LINE.

Poor Van found himself thrown into a close carriage, gagged and helpless, and driven off to the city, away, while the villains were kneeling over the body of their plot.

"You must get a boy to personate your nephew," said Cheat-ham. "It was lucky that you fell in so readily with my scheme. Ha, ha! the old man knows how to plot yet."

"I have just the boy you want," spoke up the doctor. "I will bring him up to-night. He is a clever young rascal, and will do whatever we want—for money."

"Look you," said Van Clief, "this boy must not escape, and must never leave your place alive. If there is any danger of his sanity being discovered, make him insane!"

"My dear sir, make no mistake; there are strong evidences of incurable insanity in the lad now, and I do not think that within a month he will be as insane as even you would desire."

"That is what will do it, I fancy," said Van Gend, pushing a roll of banknotes into the miscreant's fat and greedy hands.

He went away, while the doctor returned to his work, Chatham being left alone in his dingy room.

"At last I have it," he muttered, taking the long lost paper from his pocket and spreading it out upon the table. "I must keep this, for I shall want to use it against my friend some day."

He read it over carefully, and then, as he folded it up and returned it to his pocket, said with a chuckle:

"Van Clief thought he had it, because there were so many papers, but I've got it, and I intend to keep it. It will come in handy some day when I am in want of money. He! he! it is always well to keep such things."

It was late in the afternoon, and Van was sitting in his cell, moody and silent, when a boy came along whistling a lively tune.

"Hello!" said Van.

"Hello yourself," and the boy paused.

"There is a plot against me, and I have been put here to keep me out of the way. If you will release me I'll give you a hundred dollars."

"Have you got any friends?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"At the ——— Hotel. They are Mr. Harlowe and Mr. Chipps. Bring them here and you will be paid what I promised."

"Honor bright?"

"Yes; here's five dollars for you now. It's lucky I had it."

"All right. I daren't let you out, for the keepers are watching, but I'll get word to your friends."

"Do so and I will never forget you."

"What's your name?"

"Pierce Van Clief. You remember my friends' names."

"Harlowe and Chipps, at the —— Hotel."

"That's right. When will you see them?"

"What do you do?"

"I is for him, swear away men's sinners. I will defend him when anybody makes a fuss over any of the points."

"Does he pay you well for such wicked work?"

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talk to everybody this way, but I soon found out that I had you the whole business."

"You say you daren't run away?"

"No."

"Well, you see, I did something crooked once, forged a man's name—I can write a splendid hand, and imitate all

well."

"The old man found it out, and threatened to jug me if I didn't come to him. He's got the proofs, and there's an indictment pigeon-holed, which he could rake up at any time."

"Are there other sane people confined here?"

"Yes," and the lad's voice sank to a whisper. "I've seen 'em come here as reasonable in their minds as you or I, and before they left they were incurable."

"Do they leave then?"

"Yes, in cabs."

"And how can you see all this going on and say nothing?"

"I never cared much about it until lately; I never spoke to any one else as I have to you, but you're a boy, and the thought

of it has been in my mind ever since I came here. I don't know what to do, but I don't want to be all about this plot, won't you?"

"I'll tell you all about this plot, won't you?"

Van related the principal incidents of his past life, together with the scene in the agent's office, and when he had finished the boy said:

"There's something in this. You're to be kept out of the money, and somebody is to be found to personate you. Do you understand?"

"Pretend to be mad?"

"Yes. I've done that sort of work. A few months ago I was a boy whose uncle was to get a large sum of money on his death. The real boy was missing, and unless his death could be proved the money would go to some distant relatives."

"I was proved to be the nephew of this man, and told such a straight story that there was no doubt in the judges' minds. I was to live with my uncle, but after a time I was taken sick."

"You pretended to die."

"Yes. They got a boy out of a hospital, put him in my place, and he was among his sorrowing friends, and all that, was done in great style, and had a fine monument put over him."

"And you?"

"You know dark, threw off my disguise and came back here to catch some other sucker. What do you suppose I was to get for that job? Five hundred dollars! What do you think I did for the money?"

"Harold!" called a voice.

"That's the doctor," said the boy, suddenly. "I'm going to pretend to be mad."

When the doctor arrived at the spot the boy was poking fun at him, laughing at him, running a stick in between the bars of the cage, squirting the hose at him, and in other ways annoying him, the doctor standing and laughing at the boy for some moments, when he said, quietly:

"I'll do, Harold. I want to see you in the office. I've got a job for you."

When the two had got out of hearing the doctor said:

"You are Pierce Van Clief, and have been living with your father for two or three years. You are rich, and have spent many years in Africa."

"Very well. How much am I to get for all this?"

"You will be well paid."

"I won't do a job until I get a thousand dollars. This is a lot of money, and I'm going to be paid with a few dollars a week."

"Take care," said the doctor, his brow lowering. "You may get more than you bargain for. Remember I can put you in prison."

"Then, by Jove, I'm going to have something to put me there for!"

He suddenly sprang upon the man, and, wrenching his heavy walking-stick from his hand, dealt him a blow on the head.

Then quickly taking a bunch of keys from the man's pocket, he ran back, released Van, and cried hastily:

"Follow me, as you value your life. I am going to help you to escape."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RECKONING.

"To your duty, keepers; an escape, an escape!"

"Shoot him down!" roared the doctor, his face pale and bleeding from the blow given him by the indignant boy.

Harold had not retained the stick, or otherwise he might have done good work with it, but by this time he had unlocked the gate, and, swinging about, he struck one of the men a blow alongside the head with a bunch of keys, and, seizing Van by the hand, he dragged him outside.

"There is a carriage!" he cried suddenly, as they neared the front of the building. "Good!"

He was on the box in an instant, and had hurried the driver to the ground at the same moment that Van sprang inside, and, catching up the reins, he drove away like mad.

A dozen bullets whizzed by him, but although some came rather too close to his head to be pleasant, he was not hit, and was soon beyond the reach of the police.

"Good-by!" he shouted. "You can put me in prison like, but you'll go there, too, I'm thinking."

He whipped up the horses, and they went tearing down the lonely road like racers; the foam covering their sides, and hot breath coming in short, spasmodic gasps.

Such a pace could not be kept up very long, for at every jolt Harold was in danger of being thrown from his seat, and Van had to cling to the straps to prevent himself from falling into the bottom of the carriage or out of the door, which had not had time to close.

When they began to approach the city, Harold slackened his speed, and, soon stopping, jumped down and said to Van:

"Jump out. The horses can't last much longer, and we be tracked by means of them. We had better walk the rest of the way, or take the horse-cars."

Harold then started the horses off on a slow trot, and Van walked down another street, and struck one of the main avenues on which horse-cars were running.

It was growing dark now, and their being without a car would not be noticed unless they entered a car, which they decided not to do just then.

So they walked on and on in the growing darkness, and others were, like them, making their way to a common place to settle the reckoning with the villain who in fancied himself had too long fattened upon his ill-gotten wealth.

* * * * *

It was night, and John Van Clief sat in his comfortable apartments, surrounded with every luxury, thinking over the events of the day, when a visitor was announced, and he walked the doctor and proprietor of the insane asylum.

"What's the matter?" said Van Clief, "you look worried."

"Your nephew has escaped."

"Escaped!" cried Van Clief, springing to his feet. "What did that happen?"

The doctor related the circumstances briefly, and added: "I am afraid that the boy Harold will make trouble. I had him under my thumb for some time, holding him there for fear."

"Well?"

"In my mind I have decided to let him go, and I will let him go."

though he has thought I had. Now he threatens to make certain disastrous disclosures if I threaten him, and he is not the one to shrink from opening the fight when once his blood is up, and, particularly, when baited by your nephew."

"Then you suggest——"

"Immediate flight. The lunacy laws protect me, in a measure, and I can pretend to court an investigation, in the meantime covering up my tracks adroitly, so as to avoid the appearance of flight."

"I don't intend to run," said Van Clief, "while I can fight the thing out. The boy has nothing to prove his identity. His papers are in my possession, and I intend to keep them."

At that moment the servant entered, closely followed by Cheatham, who, when they were left alone, said hurriedly:

"It's a good thing I found you both here, for the jig is up! The man Chipps has sent for officers."

"But he does not know——"

"You gave Harlowe your address, and it wasn't taken from him. This man has found it."

"Then we must——"

The speech was cut short, for at that instant the door was thrown open, and Chipps rushed in excitedly.

"Ha, ha, you pirates, I've boarded ye at last!" he cried. "I've come for justice, and I intend to have it!"

"Upon him!" hissed Van Clief. "Cut him down!"

The three villains made a rush, but suddenly stopped, the sight of a gleaming revolver causing them to change their minds most peremptorily.

"Be mod'rate now," said the man, coolly. "I've got a lecture to deliver, and it's in six chapters, two apiece all around, and they'll go off mighty sudden if you ain't careful. There's very little mod'ration in a pistol."

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded Van Clief.

"First, I want the papers you stole from my friend. Lay 'em on that table in one minute, or you'll get the first two chapters of my lecture where they won't digest."

There was an air of determination in the man, despite his quaint manner, that convinced Van Clief that he would keep his word, and, throwing all hesitation aside, he laid the papers upon the table, Chipps taking them up and glancing over them.

"There's one missing," he said, quietly. "Produce it instantly, or take the consequences."

"I have given you all I had."

"There's a certain letter written by you to this dirty little scoundrel here," indicating Cheatham. "Where is it?"

"Isn't it there?"

"No."

"Then I don't know where it is."

"Well, it's among you, and if I don't get it in two minutes I'll let drive promiscuous and then let the lucky man look out for himself."

He waited a moment, and then began to move his weapon from side to side in a threatening manner.

This was too much for Cheatham, and he drew forth the letter and threw it down, crying:

"Don't shoot, don't shoot! Here is what you want. It got into my pocket by mistake."

"It's lucky I didn't shoot you by mistake," said Chipps, dryly. "Now, there's one thing more I want, and that is for you," looking at Van Clief, "to acknowledge your nevvie, Pierce Van Clief, before these scamps."

"How do I know that he is? I have not seen him for ten years."

"You know he is, or else what did you want him put out of the way for and another boy to take his place?"

"It's all up," said the doctor; "that rascally Harold has told the whole thing."

"Quite right," said a voice, and Harold entered. "It was lucky I found Chipps just as he was going out, or he would have gone on a wild-goose chase."

"We are cornered," said Cheatham. "Anyhow, I am safe enough. I had nothing to do with the plot against the boy."

"How about buying an infernal machine and stowing it on the Adriatic?" asked an officer who now made his appearance.

"Don't know anything about it," chattered Cheatham.

"No? Perhaps the dying confession of one Sigmund Goldschmidt, clockmaker, will enlighten you. There are mentioned several men who bought machines of him, and one of his best customers was a certain Darius Cheatham, agent and attorney-at-law."

"It's a lie! That's a brother of mine."

"Too thin, gentlemen. I have warrants for your arrest."

"Upon what charges?"

"Conspiring against the life and liberty of Pierce Van Clief, shipping explosive materials with malicious intent, abuse of the lunacy laws, and endeavoring to obtain money under false pretenses."

"I acknowledge myself beaten," said Van Clief, "but you shall never take me to prison. I defy you!"

He sprang toward a large window behind him, and, before any one could stop him, went crashing through the glass and disappeared.

The rascally doctor attempted to escape in the excitement, but Harold seized him and forced him into a seat, panting and out of breath.

He was taken with an apoplectic fit in an instant, and rolled upon the floor in agony, foaming at the mouth, and uttering the most frightful shrieks.

In a few moments two men entered the room, led by Van, and bearing between them something which they laid upon a velvet sofa, and covered with a sheet.

It was John Van Clief, bleeding, bruised and dead, the fall from the window having broken his neck, killing him instantly.

Cheatham, pale and trembling, was led away by the police, and Van was left alone to watch by the side of his dead uncle.

There has been a reckoning indeed, and the villains have dearly paid for their crimes, two with their lives and one by imprisonment for life.

It seemed that a brief dispatch, announcing the death of the German clockmaker, and intimating that he had made a confession, having been received by the newspapers, a request for more detailed information had been called for, and a list of persons implicated had been returned.

Cheatham confessed, and was sent to prison, where he died in a year, regretted by no one, and leaving considerable property behind him, which was eaten up by legal disputes in a short time.

Van's uncle being dead, the boy soon came into his property, and is now a wealthy man, the sale of his father's diamonds alone realizing a large amount.

They were not all sold, however, for the largest and finest ones were made into a necklace and other ornaments, which was a wedding present from Van to his wife, once known as Lena Goldschmidt.

Harlowe still lives, and is the owner and commander of a noble vessel, plying between New York and the East Indies, and known as the Sargasso, in memory of one of the most exciting periods of his life.

Harold has reformed, and is one of Van's best friends, not even excepting old Chipps, who is as moderate as he ever was, and who still loves to deliver temperance lectures, with the old-time consequences, be it remembered, and who with Van and Harlowe has much to say concerning the time when together they spent FIVE YEARS IN THE GRASSY SEA.

THE END.

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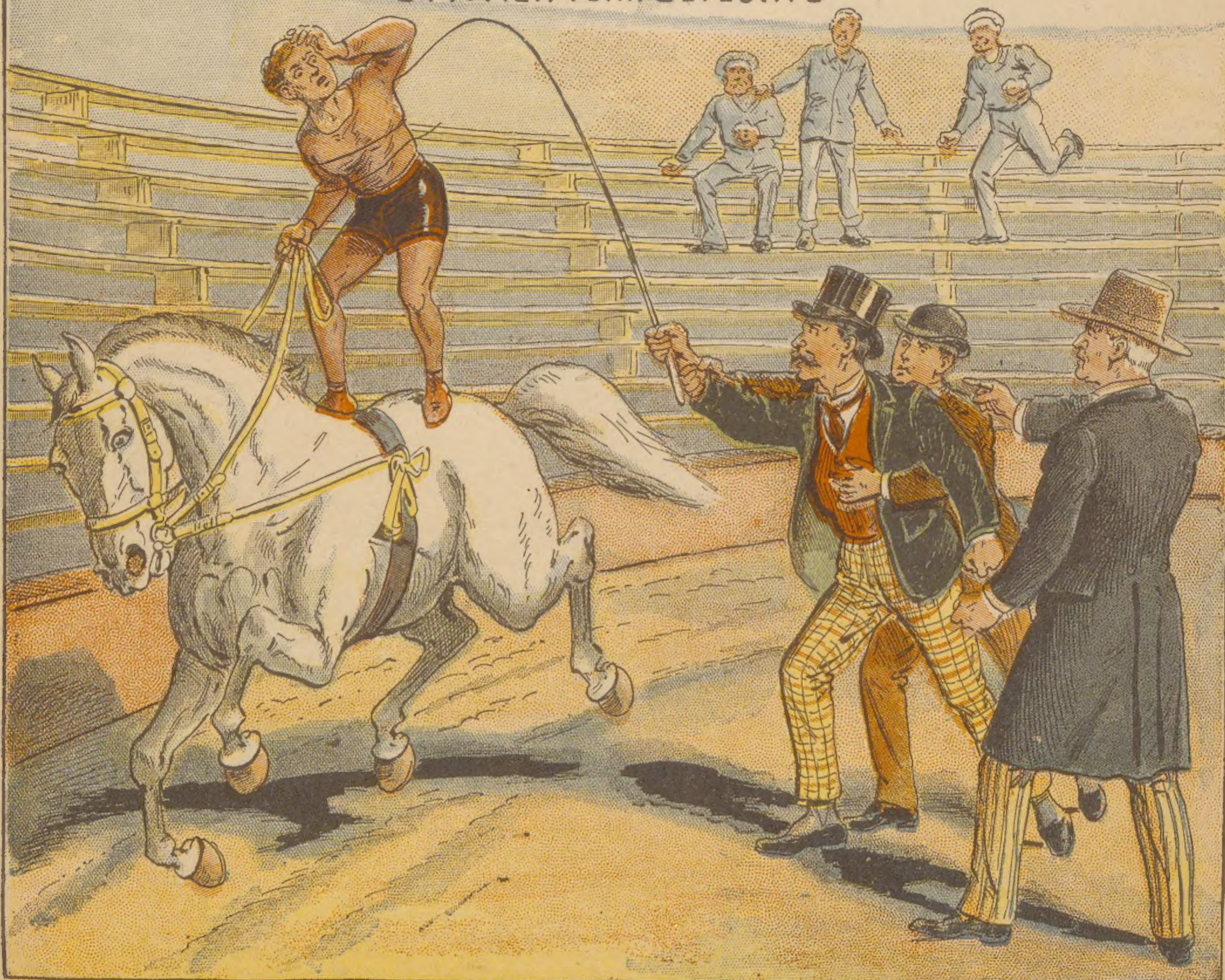
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